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SOCCER WEEKLY

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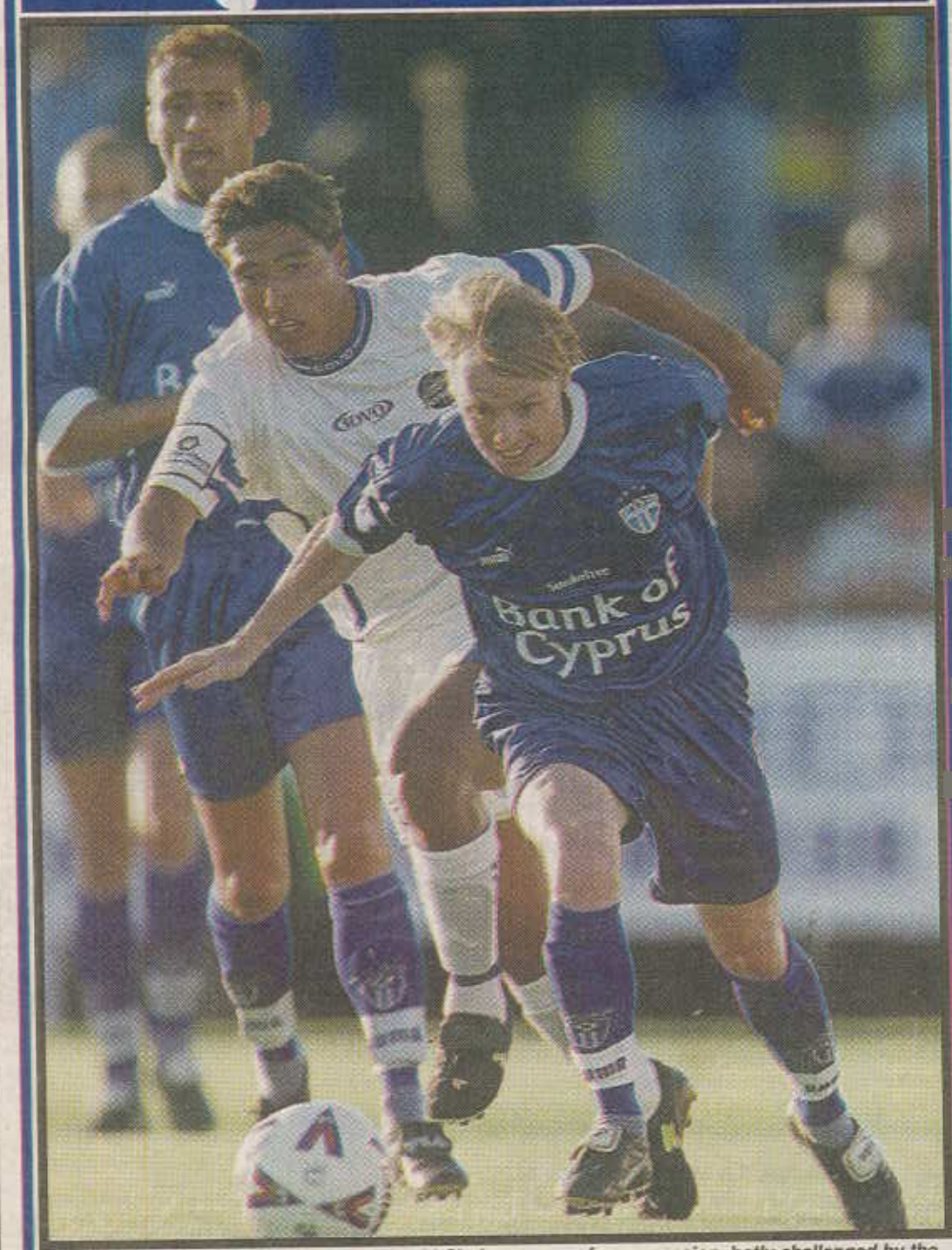
Super Souths



South Melbourne's Right wing back, David Clarkson, races for possession, hotly challenged by the white shirted Sydney Olympic striker, Nicky Carle, with left midfielder Con Boutsianis looking on.

By John Economos

South Melbourne over the past three weeks has rocketted to the top of the NSL ladder and have now become real hot favourites to take out this season's National League championship.

Following a 0-3 win over Sydney United, a 0-0 draw with Newcastle United plus a well disciplined 1-0 victory last Saturday night over Sydney Olympic, rookie Mickey Petersen's Souths are already resembling the League championship winning sides previous South Melbourne teams of the 90s.

Despite being his first year in the senior position as Head coach at the Club, Petersen, (a former Souths player himself), has already lifted Souths from last season's lowly position of 10th to burst ahead today to be rated as a most serious contender for the League championship.

With an almost perfect cocktail mix of youth that is very well blended with heaps of experienced players, Souths right now is the NSL's most powerful and feared outfit.

The Parramatta Power's Head coach, David Mitchell, endorsed such high, early season rating, when last Friday evening he stated to ABSW: "Souths is certainly the side to beat this season. They easily were the best team we have played against."

Again skippered by mercurial striker Paul Trimboli, galvanised at the back by a super efficient 'flat four' of the well-disciplined David Clarkson, Mehmet Durakovic, Patrick Kisnorbo and Fausto de Amicis, Souths already is seriously threatening to once again emboss its name on the League title.

BRISBANE'S BRILLIANT BRAZILIAN

As Brown burst's Spirit's bubble

By John Economos

Brisbane's brilliant Brazilian striker, Fernando Rech, nailed in his first NSL hat-trick that went a long way to sinking the visiting Adelaide City 6-2 last Saturday night at the Suncorp Stadium.

So much for the Soccer smart alec that first stated upon Rech's arrival earlier this season at Brisbane from Brazil that, ".he can't be much of a player if he's a Brazilian that has two names.."

Should the Queenslanders now rename their Brazilian import just 'Fernando', or just 'Rech'.

Either way their Brazilian hero rained in his goals in the 49th, 50th and 76th minutes that sent the 'Black and Whites' from South Australia crashing to their heaviest defeat in years.

Meanwhile back in Sydney at the Parramatta Stadium, the Parramatta Power last Friday night sent the Northern Spirit crashing to a 3-0 defeat, the Spirit's first defeat in Sydney this season.

Spearheaded by right wingback Ahmad Elrich, mobile striker Joel Griffiths, midfield-playmaker Milan Blagojevic, plus debutant left midfielder Damien Brown, the Power switched on a second half surge to electrify both their opponents and the 8,176 fans in attendance.

The Power's latest win continues the team's six week unbeaten streak that has sent it soaring up the NSL ladder and into outright third position.

Brisbane's Hat-Trick hero Fernando Rech.

Parramatta Power's Milan Blagojevic (right) is dispossed by Northern Spirit's Matthew Bingley during Power's 3-0 win last Friday night.

THE YEAR THAT WAS 2000: PICTORIAL PAGES 8 AND 9

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Belconnen teach Titavi a lesson

By Graham Cooke

Samoan national coach Vic Fernandez has no delusions of grandeur when the country's champion team, Titavi, plays in the Oceania qualifying competition for the World Club Championship in Papua New Guinea later this month.

In Canberra for some much-needed training and match practice, Titavi crashed 5-1 to Belconnen Blue Devils, the national capital's representative in the NSW Premier League, on Friday night.

That came after a 4-2 loss to the Canberra Cosmos youth team and a 5-2 win over Canberra Deakin, although it must be pointed out the ACT Premiership side were playing out of season.

Still to come is a match-up with the Cosmos first team tonight.

Fernandez said these games were the first the side had played for nine weeks.

"We have eight 16-year-olds in the squad, but these are not excuses," he said.

"Our aim in PNG is to go for good results against the other South Pacific nations and to do our best against the Australians and New Zealanders. It would be foolish to expect anything more.

"The long term target is to get soccer on the same footing with rugby, which is undoubtedly the most popular game in Samoa at present."

And he believes he has a star of the future in 16-year-old Adess Faaviaso, who despite his youth scored 28 goals in the local competition last season.

Injury limited Faaviaso to a 10-minute spell at the end, by which time the match was well and truly in Belconnen's keeping.

Robbie Schroder opened the scoring for the Devils, George Cattanach added a second and, in a flurry of scoring before half time, Steve Lazzari netted twice for Belconnen and Michael Junior replied for Titavi.

The only goal of the second half was the best of the game, a scorching drive from Matt Julienne.

Devils coach Lino Fiorese criticised his side for "coasting" in the second half.

"Up to half time we were decisive and direct and we got rewards,"

he said. "Afterwards we wanted to make that extra touch and our game suffered.

"But generally I'm happy with an excellent work-out in the lead-up to Saturday's league match with Leichhardt."

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE

SOUTHERN DIVISION

LEADING GOALSCORERS

Name	Team	Goals
Steve Mancevski	South Melbourne	12
Denis Mustac	Eastern Pride	10
Nick Waite	Peninsula Blues	9
Viktor Memeti	South Dandenong	9
Daniel Debeve	Whittlesea Stallions	8
Brett Cunningham	Fawkner Blues	7
Josip Loncaric	Melbourne Knights	7

ROUND 11 MATCHES

SATURDAY 6 JANUARY 2001

Eastern Pride v South Melbourne
(Mobil Park, 4 pm)

Green Gully v Peninsula Blues
(Green Gully Reserve, 5 pm)

Sth Melb Academy v Preston Lions
(Keilor Park Reserve, 5 pm)

SUNDAY 7 JANUARY 2001

Albury Wodonga v Bulleen Zebras
(George Andrews Reserve, 4 pm)

Whittlesea Stallions v Melbourne Knights,
(TBA)

Fawkner Blues v South Dandenong (Reggio Calabria Club, 4 pm)

Melbourne Knights Academy v VIS
(Knights Stadium, TBA)

WEDNESDAY 10 JANUARY 2001

Green Gully v Melb Knights Academy
(Green Gully Reserve, 7 pm)

By Roy Hay

PENINSULA 3 VIS 1

Round 10 opened last Friday night with another fine result in front of an excellent crowd at Lawton Reserve as the Peninsula Blues, formerly Carlton's Academy team, beat the VIS by 3-1.

Brendan Beni put the VIS ahead 20 minutes into the game, but the VIS had a player sent off and this changed the balance somewhat.

Nick Waite equalized from the penalty spot after 65 minutes, then ten minutes later blasted home a thirty metre effort. Liam Cafferty rounded off the scoring for the Blues in 80 minutes.

EASTERN PRIDE 2 SOUTH DANDENONG 0

In a match brought forward from a later round, Eastern Pride beat South Dandenong 2-0 at Mobil Stadium.

A penalty by Mark Lorenzo after 33 minutes separated the teams at the break, but it was not till the 85th minute that the Pride got its second goal through Ross Duckworth and could feel that it had the match under control.

MELB KNIGHTS 4 STH MELB ACAD 1

Melbourne Knights beat South Melbourne Eagles Academy 4-1. The Knights led three-nil at the break after Anthony Pelikan scored twice, in 18 and 33 minutes.

Jasmin Sehic got the third after 35 minutes. The match was then controlled by the Knights defence in which Daniel Piorkowski,.Ivica Klarica and Adam Petkov were outstanding.

Ivan Mioc pulled a goal back for the Academy but Ivan Gelemanovic restored the three goal advantage for the Knights just before the end.

ALBURY 2 PRESTON 0

Albury Wodonga had a good 2-0 away win over Preston Lions at Connor Reserve.

Matt Vaccaro gave the Warriors a fine start with a goal after only three minutes. Karl Mills effort after 27 minutes gave his side some breathing space and they held out the young Lions fairly effectively.

BULLEEN 1 GREEN GULLY 1

Bulleen Zebras and Green Gully Cavaliers drew one-all at the Veneto Club. It was level pegging throughout with two players sent off and the match only being decided in the last few minutes.

Steve Bouios seemed to have put Zebras through with a goal in 83 minutes, but three minutes into injury time D Vasic replied for Green Gully.

STH MELB 8 MELB KNIGHTS ACAD 0

South Melbourne hammered the Melbourne Knights Academy by 8-0. The goalscorers in this match were not available at time of writing.

ROUND 10 RESULTS

FRIDAY 29 DECEMBER 2000

Peninsula Blues 3 (Nick Waite 2, Liam Cafferty) **VIS 1** (Brendan Beni)

SATURDAY 30 DECEMBER 2000

Melbourne Knights 4 (Antony Pelikan 2, Jasmin Sehic, (Ivan Mioc) **South Melbourne Eagles Acad 1** (Ivan Gelemanovic)

Preston Lions 0 Albury Wodonga 2 (Karl Mills, Matt Vaccaro)

Bulleen Zebras 1 (Steve Bouios) **Green Gully 1** (D Vasic)

Sth Melb 8 Melbourne Knights Academy 0

Fawkner Blues v Whittlesea Academy
(Match not played)

Eastern Pride 2 (Mark Lorenzo, Ross Duckworth) **South Dandenong 0**

(Match brought forward from future round)

ROUND 10 TABLES

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Eastern Pride	10	9	0	1	39	9	27
Melb Knights	10	8	0	2	30	12	24
VIS	11	7	1	3	29	18	22
South Melb In	9	7	0	2	56	16	21
Peninsula	8	5	0	3	25	11	15
South Dand	9	4	2	3	21	17	14
Whittlesea	7	4	0	3	23	16	12
Sth Melb Ac	9	4	0	5	19	21	12
Knights Ac	9	4	0	5	12	23	12
Albury	10	3	1	6	10	25	10
Green Gully	10	2	3	5	11	21	9
Bulleen	11	2	2	7	14	29	8
Fawkner Blues	8	1	1	6	10	29	4
Preston Lions	9	0	0	9	6	58	0

NORTHERN DIVISION

ROUND 11

FRIDAY 22 DECEMBER 2000

NSWIS 0 Parramatta Power 3 (Santalab 51, Holman 53, Down 78)

SATURDAY 23 DECEMBER 2000

Sydney United 2 (Picken 64, Webb 73) **Marconi Stallions Colts 3** (Bastac 30, Gibson 31, Brosque 37)

Sydney Olympic Youth 0
Wollongong Wolves 0

Newcastle United Colts 2 (Rufo 4, Thodas 45) **Canberra Cosmos 5** (Aleksic 21, 34, Ivanic 72, 88, 92)

ACT Academy 1 (Radford 40) **Marconi Stallions Youth 6** (Anabalon 39, 77, Gulesserian 40, 84, Last 70, own goal 81)

Newcastle United Youth — Bye

RESCHEDULED MATCH — TO BE PLAYED ON 16/03/01
Northern Spirit v QAS

RESCHEDULED MATCH — TBA
AIS v Sydney Olympic Academy

LEAGUE LADDER

	P	W	D	B	L	F	A	Pts
A.I.S.	**11**	**9**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**28**	**9**	**28**
Marconi Stallions	10	7	2	0	1	20	5	23
Parramatta Power	10	7	1	0	2	32	13	22
Northern Spirit	9	6	1	1	2	20	7	19
Sydney United	10	5	1	1	4	19	17	17
Marconi Stallions	10	5	0	1	5	24	16	15
Wollongong Wolves	9	4	3	1	2	17	10	15
Newcastle Utd	9	4	1	1	4	13	9	13
Q.A.S.	12	4	1	0	7	20	32	13
Canberra Cosmos	10	3	3	1	4	21	20	12
Sydney Olympic	9	3	2	1	4	17	19	11
N.S.W.I.S.	10	3	2	1	5	8	14	11
Sydney Olympic Academy	10	1	2	0	7	10	19	5
Newcastle United	7	1	0	1	6	3	25	3
ACT Academy	10	1	0	1	9	4	40	3

Thompson To Debut For Marconi

By John Economos

Marconi this Saturday night plays host to Newcastle United at the Marconi Stadium in a clash that promises not only to be full of intrigue, but should also see new signing Archie Thompson make his NSL debut with the home side.

Thompson, the explosive paced Carlton striker, and the League's second top goalscorer, was snapped up late last week by Marconi following the demise of Carlton.

Archie Thompson: Marconi's new striker.

Todd McManus: Newcastle's star central defender.

Marconi has struggled to score goals this season, having nailed the target just 12 times in 11 games.

Coach Eddie Krncevic signed Thompson in a desperate move to solve Marconi's scoring dilemma.

But Marconi's scoring problems, (in reality), are not confined to the striking area.

It's the midfield sector which is largely to blame for Marconi's dearth of goals.

Not since the days of the phlegmatic, (but highly creative), Tommy McCulloch, or better still, the fabulous and classy Italian import, Ermano Pelucchi, has Marconi had a real specialist 'midfield-playmaker'.

Eddie Krncevic: Marconi's coach.

The Marconi coach stated to ABSW: "We had a friendly hit out against NSW Premier League side, Leichhardt Tigers last Saturday night and Archie Thompson had a good run.

"He not only scored a goal but set another up. We won 3-1 with Darren McDonald and Kris Trajanovski scoring the other two," stated Krncevic.

"I just hope we have a big crowd on Saturday night, not only for the fans to see Archie play his first match for Marconi, but also after our great result last week against the Perth Glory over in Western Australia," highlighted the Marconi coach.

Newcastle United's coach Lee Sterrey, has an intimate knowledge of Marconi's style, having two years back been employed for three years on the coaching staff of the Sydney Club.

Newcastle who are most desperate for League points, having achieved just one win from their last 12 outings, drew 1-1 at home last Friday night against Sydney United.

The Novocastrian side which is currently perilously languishing third from the bottom of the League Ladder, is hugely missing the intelligent constructive play of its attack-leader and striker, Andy Harper. Harper has not played a single match to date this season for Newcastle.

It's possible that the astute Sterrey will assign the unenviable task of shackling the mobile Thompson to his star central marker, Todd McManus.

Lee Sterrey: Newcastle United's coach.

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The Good Oil ... The Good Oil ...

By John Economos

MEHMET DURAKOVIC, South Melbourne's former international central marker or sweeper, racked up his 150th match for Souths in last Saturday night's Big Match against the visiting Sydney Olympic at the Bob Jabe Stadium.

Mehmet, who gained 59 international caps playing for Australia, has played 282 games in the NSL overall.

He now becomes only the 13th player to have knocked up 150 NSL games with Souths.

Mehmet Durakovic: Souths' fabulous star defender.

Others to have played 150 NSL games whilst with South Melbourne, have included:

Current coach Mickey Petersen, Paul Trimboli, (Souths' current captain), Steve Panopoulos and Con Boutsianis.

●●●●

SOUTH MELBOURNE's marketing people did a fabulous job in promoting last Saturday night's Big Match against Sydney Olympic at the Bob Jane Stadium.

Everyday last week, and despite the holidays, Souths marketing people were sending out daily media releases with updates for this game.

Extremely well done Souths.

There should be much more of this done by all the other clubs.

●●●●

ARCHIE THOMPSON, formerly of Carlton, late last week signed a two year contract with Marconi.

Thompson stated to the media; "In the end, it was a relatively simple decision to make.

"Marconi is a huge Club with a tremendous set up and high ambitions for success.

"We have a good team that I'm sure will give the competition a real shake. I'm looking forward to getting into action with the boys," ended Thompson.

Meanwhile Marconi's Secretary of Soccer, Frank Labbozzetta, added: "The availability of a quality player such as Archie mid-season, is a rare event.

"Obviously whilst the circumstances are sad, life goes on and we are excited at welcoming Archie to our stable.

"He is one of Australian Soccer's most exciting players and will, undoubtedly add to our League championship aspirations.

"I'm certain his flair will also quickly establish him as one of our crowd's favourite," ended Labbozzetta.

It's expected that Thompson will make his debut for Marconi in the NSL this Saturday night against Newcastle United at the Marconi Stadium.

●●●●

WHICH NSL CLUB's Major sponsorship collapsed recently, leaving the respective Club temporarily 'stranded down the wicket'?

It was a shonky deal to start with anyhow.

Luckily for that Club, its Fundraising Manager swiftly moved like an Adam Gilchrist to quickly score another deal.

The Manager moved quickly and upgraded the Club's second sponsor to Major status to close the gap.

Who is the Club concerned?

"Good Oil' is not at liberty to say at this stage.

But what we can tell you, (confidentially), is the actual new deal.

It involves $35,000 in cash plus another $35,000 in goods and services.

This is a vast drop from last season's Major Sponsor who used to hand over $150,000 per season to the Club.

●●●●

CHAD ('Mandella') GIBSON, Marconi's steely midfielder cum-defender, flies out of Sydney tonight, (Tuesday), to join Norwegian club side, Bodo-Glimt.

The durable Chad joins the Norwegian side on a one year loan deal with a two year option attached.

ABSW wishes 'Mandella' all the 'Georgie Best' in Norway.

Chad Gibson: Marconi's midfielder off to Norway tonight.

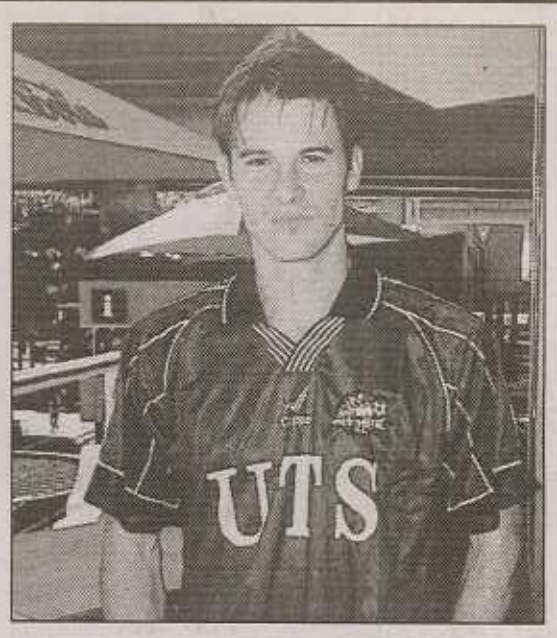
●●●●

ZLATKO ARAMBASIC, played his 100th NSL match last Friday night against Newcastle United at the Marathon Stadium.

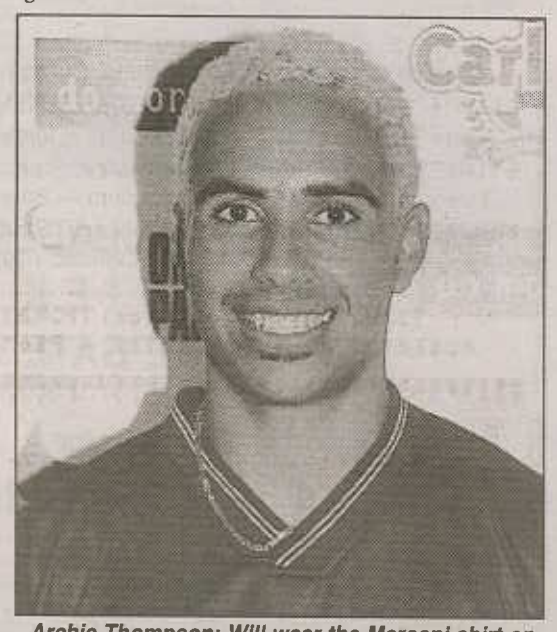
The 31 year old striker made his debut in the National League in 1986 with Blacktown City before being transferred overseas to Belgian Club Mechelen.

The lanky striker as well had stints with Oosente, French side Metz and Dutch club NAC Breda.

Upon his return from Europe, Arambasic joined Sydney Olympic for a season before signing up this season with Alan Hunter's Sydney United. '



Zlatko Arambasic: 100th NSL match.



Archie Thompson: Will wear the Marconi shirt on Saturday night against Newcastle United at the Marconi Stadium.

●●●●

SOCCER AUSTRALIA last week received three new applications from clubs expressing serious desires to join the National League.

Two of the new aspiring League member applications lobbed in from Western Australia whilst another was fired in from Queensland.

Applications for entry to the National Soccer League, Season 2001-2002, closed last Friday at 5 pm.

In addition to all existing Member Clubs, (15), further applications were submitted by:

The Brisbane Lions—Queensland.

Fremantle City-Western Australia.

Western Lightening soccer Club-Western Australia.

The League's Review Committee will screen all applications alongside the League's Criteria and all clubs will be rated and assessed accordingly.

The restructured League will involve 12 clubs that will be announced no later than June 4th 2001.

●●●●

DAVID MITCHELL, Head coach of the Parramatta Power who in the last six Rounds has gone undefeated whilst collecting 16 most valuable League points, stated last Friday:

"To date, South Melbourne has most definitely been the best side we have played this season.

"They are a very experienced and solid team."

The highly knowledgeable National Technical Director of Malaysian Football and former Head coach at the AIS, was with his wife at the Parramatta Stadium last Friday night to watch the Power down the Spirit in a match rated as one of the best seen to date this season.

The most amicable Smithy won the Malaysian League championship in the very first season he went over to coach Sabah, the team that former St George international striker Scotty Ollerenshaw played for. Smith the same season came within a whisker of also winning the Malaysian Cup Final.

David Mitchell: Salutes South Melbourne.

●●●●

RONNIE SMITH with wife Allison in tandem, flew back from Kuala Lumper to spend time with their family in Canberra.

●●●●

'GOOD OIL' last week, broke that a Soccer Australia official was flying out for Tahiti to meet up with the National coach of France who was over there for a short holiday.

Of course our scoop was correct, as was confirmed last Friday night by our National coach Frank Farina.

Farina who was an interested spectator last Friday evening at the Parramatta Stadium, stated to 'Good Oil':

"Yes it's true we have one of our officials in Tahiti to line up the French to come out here.

"The World Champions would be a sensational hit on our market.

"But I'm wondering, when would we be able to play them as from April through to December our international diary is going to be pretty congested."

Ronnie Smith: Back in Sydney for Christmas break.

Frank Farina: Could be challenging the World Champions in Australia.

The Good Oil ... The Good Oil

By John Economos

WHO is the gifted striker that has been driving his NSL coach over the past almost two seasons crackers?

The mobile striker in question is wonderfully gifted, but unfortunately he lacks almost total self, and team, discipline.

●●●●

SCOTT CHIPPERFIELD, the Wollongong Wolves explosive left flanker, ripped out a wonderful hat-trick last Friday evening at the WIN Stadium that finally sank a defiant Eastern Pride 4-2.

"Chipper's" Friday night effort has now rocketted him up the goal-charts to sit as joint top goalscorer in the NSL together with Spirit's Ben Burgess, the Power's Joe Miller and Souths' Andy Vlahos.

Chipperfield has now amassed a total of 40 goals for Wollongong, easily breaking the Club's previous record of 36 goals, held by the Club's former star marksman, Pat Brodnik.

●●●●

Scott Chipperfield: Nailed a hat-trick last Friday night.

He's got pace, great courage in the box and thankfully some vision.

But it's his positional and constructive play that is driving his coach nuts.

As well, his erratic work-rate is also most questionable.

It seems that the young marksman, who undoubtedly has heaps of potential for future international arenas, is slowly wearing down the patience of his coach. Make that rapidly.

GRAEME McKINNON, the former great Apia international striker, was recently back in Sydney from the Philippines.

Graeme for the past 12 odd years, has been living in Cebu, in the Philippines.

He has been spending his entire life over there in spreading the gospel of Soccer amongst the very young and very poor people.

The Australian Soccer philanthropist, coaches children very early in the morning, (sometimes as early as 5 am), before they have to trudge off to school.

Last June, one of McKinnon's young Rep sides, (Under 14s), played in a tournament with what you'd call some real and unquestionable success.

Inside four weeks, the 'McKinnon lads' played no less than 13 games against the big guns of the Philippines, winning all 13 matches to become champions and take out the 'Visayas Cup'.

Two months ago McKinnon assembled a brand new squad of Under 8s and put them into training.

These youngsters had never played the game of Soccer.

●●●●

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE side, the Leichhardt Tigers, were struck a most tragic and cruel blow over the Christmas break.

At between 5.30 am and 6.30 am on Boxing Day, an electrical fire broke out at the Club's home ground at Lambert Park.

The Tigers' President, Mr Tony Raciti, when contacted by 'Good Oil', stated: "It just couldn't have come at a worse time.

"Our office secretary Pia, had just re organised her office, records and computers which were all totally destroyed.

"The Fire Brigade people determined that an electrical fault was the cause and that the fire would have been slowly smouldering before breaking out into a full blaze."

Despite the Fire Brigade arriving within minutes of the alarm going off, the fire devastated the Club's Soccer Office, the Grandstand as well as destroying valuable records plus the Club's entire stock of Soccer gear.

Tony Raciti: President of the Leichhardt Tigers.

Graeme McKinnon's latest training squad at Cebu, in the Philippines — an Under 8s side.

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SYDNEY: Thursday 18th January. *Start 8pm*
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ADELAIDE: Sunday 21st January. *Start 7.30pm*
Adelaide City v Red Star (Hindmarsh Stadium)
PERTH: Sunday 28th January. *Start 7.30pm*
State Team v Red Star (Litis Stadium — former Velodrom)
SYDNEY: Wednesday 31st January. *Start 7.30pm*
Marconi v Red Star (Marconi Stadium — Bossley Park)
MELBOURNE: Monday 5th February. *Start 7.30pm*
Fitzroy City (Serbia) v Red Star (Olympic Village Stadium)

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OFF THE CROSSBAR

By Allan Crisp

LOUTS CHUCKED OUT

Hooliganism raised its ugly head at Hindmarsh Stadium for the first time this season during Adelaide City's last home game against Melbourne Knights, resulting in 12 spectators being ejected by police.

The unruly behaviour included lighting flares and setting fire to a plastic seat behind the northern grandstand goal.

A security guard at the scene said papers had been placed under the seat and deliberately lit.

The "cheer squad" of about 40 people displayed a large Melbourne Knights banner, unashamedly identifying themselves as Victorian visitors.

The group was reinforced by several known locals who, at first, looked to be enjoying the exciting game and the festive occasion.

But, it all turned sour when the flares erupted, sending security staff scurrying to quell the flames.

Police action ensured that the ranks of the group were considerably reduced when they reassembled behind the opposite goal for the second half.

It's great to unashamedly support your team, but bringing shame upon the club, is a very different matter.

BIG IMPROVEMENT

Comparisons, it is said are odious, but it's all good news when Adelaide City fans compare last season with the current campaign at the same stage of proceedings.

After round 11 last season, City was stone, motherless last on the NSL ladder, having scored a miserable eight goals.

With 11 matches under their belt this time, the Force sat seventh, with 18 goals to their credit.

There also has been a sharp turnover in personnel with only Aurelio Vidmar, Carl Veart, Claudio Pelosi and Brad Hassell remaining from the corresponding starting line-up from last season.

It's history how City managed a remarkable reversal of form to earn a place in the finals last season through a sensational second half sequence of successes.

If the current run continues, fans will be spared a similar nail-biting conclusion this time.

KEEN KOSTA RETURNS

Former Socceroo Youth international Kosta Salapasidis, 22 has returned home to Adelaide and has agreed to rejoin Adelaide City Force until the end of the current season.

Salapasidis hit the headlines in 1997 when he netted four goals for the Socceroo Youth team to spearhead a historic 4-3 win over Argentina.

Kosta Salapasidis: Rejoining Adelaide City until season's end.

The striker or attacking midfielder left City to join Wollongong Wolves on loan the following season and later signed for Spanish second division club Compostella.

Salapasidis, son of former Greek international striker Sam Salapasidis, rejoins the Force after a spell with Swiss club Lugano.

City has left the door ajar for Salapasidis to resume his career overseas should he receive a suitable offer.

Another ex-Adelaide City youngster, David Terminello has not been as fortunate in his negotiations to rejoin the Force after the demise of his former club, Carlton.

Terminello has been seeking a similar short-term contract to that allowed Salapasidis, but, as we went to press, the situation was unresolved.

The 20-year midfielder has been asked to commit to a three-year contract, but is keen to pursue his ambition to play overseas.

Terminello acknowledges that City, or any other club, could find difficulty in taking on another squad member in the middle of the campaign but remains hopeful.

Meanwhile, word from the corridors of power suggest that Terminello has taken too long to agree on terms.

RED LETTER DAY

Mark down Sunday, January 21 as a red-letter day and paste it in your hat. That's the date scheduled for Adelaide City Force to host Red Star Belgrade at Hindmarsh Stadium.

City and Marconi are set to supply the NSL opposition during the Red Star tour that will include matches against NSL Premier League club Bonnyrigg and Victorian club Fitzroy City.

QUESTION TIME

Melbourne Knights coach Vlado Vanis faced a barrage of questions during the post-match press conference when the cucumber cool customer was asked to analyse his team's 2-3 loss to Adelaide City.

"Was it a good idea to field his Carlton captures, Andrew Marth, Steve Horvat and Lubo Lapsansky (in the second half), considering the trio had not played for three weeks?"

Vlado Vanis

Vanis defended his action by saying, "They are three very experienced players, who will improve our team."

Rival coach Zoran Matic, asked to comment on the Knights, he declared he was impressed by their method of play.

"They are bound to improve and I believe they will make it through to the top six," Matic said.

Meanwhile, Jason Vukadin will recall his 50th appearance for the Knights with less than fond memories.

Vukadin surrendered his captaincy to former club skipper Marth and was red carded before half time after his second booking.

Allan Crisp can be heard on the 5RPH (1197am) Breakfast Soccer Show each Tuesday from 7.30am-9am, along with former Australian international John Perin and Channel 10 Sports presenter Robbie Popplestone.

WOLLONGONG NEWS

Respect Towards Wolves — no wonder Wollongong coach Ron Corry is sick of opponents whinging time and time again that they were unlucky to share or lose points playing the Wolves.

They fail to acknowledge that the Wolves are this year's National Champion and a solid well playing outfit.

Give the boys credit they are good enough to defeat any side in the league.

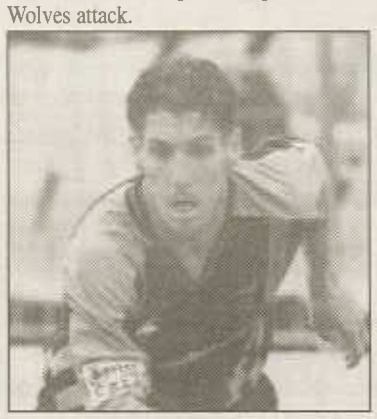
There is no such thing as "unlucky" in soccer, you make your own fate. Players create and finish moves if they are a class side and that is what oppositions may as well recognise. In case people have not noticed, Wollongong are in second spot on the table — one point from the leaders.

■■■■

Ron Corry: Sick of other teams complaining about his side.

Robbie Middleby returns home — even if originally from Newcastle, Robbie played his inaugural national league debut in Wollongong before departure to Europe. The midfield player signed with the Wolves after stints with Carlton in Melbourne, the Kingz in New Zealand and FC Uerdingen in Germany.

He will add depth and pace to the Wolves attack.



Robbie Middleby: Back with Wollongong.

■■■■

David Cervinski Back — after a rest of several weeks with a niggling ankle injury the giant stopper is ready for action again. The team will be pleased to see his height back in the opposition's goal area when taking corners and on the other side his tough no frills style is needed in his own team's defence line-up.

David Cervinski: Back in action.

■■■■

Ceccoli Strikes — Battled Hardened Defender — a natural left footer, Alvin Ceccoli scored his first goal this season against Sydney United recently. He joined the club four years ago from State League and developed into a top performer, scoring vitals goals from set-piece-situations or free kicks using his lethal left foot.

■■■■

Chipperfield makes it 37 strikes — when Scott Chipperfield scored last week against Sydney Olympic he broke a long lasting club record bringing his tally up to 37 goals for the Wolves.

Scott Chipperfield: Record breaker at the Wolves.

He overtook the previous club record held by Pat Brodnik many years ago and can go on for a number of more goals, setting an aim for future Wolves strikers.

■■■■

Youth Team Close Encounter — scored with the final whistle but disadvantaged by an over-zealous referee, blowing with the ball hitting the back of the net off a great free-kick taken by max Nickolson. No doubt coach Eddie Teroso had to restrain himself and pacify his players.

One must doubt the wisdom shown by the neutral man in the middle it is not normal practice to sound the final whistle when the ball is in the air.

Playing well for the Wolves were George Nohra (he hit the goal post), Max Nicholson (same fate and with a score not given), Paul Harris, Liam Austin, Daniel Aldridge and keeper Daniel Beltrame — back from injury for his first full game.

■■■■

Illawarra 17 First Division Clubs — must attract the talent of youngsters, eager to prove themselves as promising soccer players. In some cases former top grade players could join if they are unable to put in enough training time as required in Premier League but still enjoy playing competitive soccer.

Some are lost to Amateur sides where no strict training routine applies, playing for the fun of it. First Division clubs will find it very hard to aim for top league soccer in Premier League, needing to fulfil requirements like proper playing grounds, floodlights, playing strength and financial sponsorship of substantial dimension.

On the other hand there are thousand of Juniors coming out of their time, ready to step into senior soccer. it is critical to spot the suitable young talent and attract their commitment.

In an annual circle new class soccer players emerge, other retire, but the pools of talent does not diminish, it's there to be tapped. Note every player makes the NSL or Premier League, however could be a fine First Division competitor.

A good club coach and active committee is needed to build and create a successful First Division team. What to do when winning the competition is another question of being ready to tackle top league soccer with all its commitments and cost involved.

■■■■

All Illawarra Soccer Clubs — the Association has for next season 29 nominations — are due to commence regular twice per week training on Tuesdays and Thursdays early January 2001.

Good luck and a successful new soccer year.

■■■■

PRODIGAL SON BACK AT EDENSOR

By Tonci Prusac

He's tall, talented and a very tough tackling defender, arguably one of the best the Croatian backed Sydney United Soccer Club has produced from within its own ranks in the last decade.

He was a member of Branko Culina's 1996/97 minor premiership winning team — one of the most attractive ball-playing sides in recent years.

Last year however, down at Edensor Park, it was forbidden to mention Richard Plesa's name out loud (at least on match days), for fear of 'recrimination' because he had been labelled a 'scab', a 'traitor' and worse by some of the more passionate, emotion-charged fans.

Plesa, you see, was one of the infamous band of merry men that had followed former Bravehearts' coach David Mitchell to new cross-town entity Parramatta Power.

As a result of the initial pillage on United's playing personnel, a growing level of antagonism has developed in the short space of time that Power has been in the NSL.

Plesa, was especially targeted by United fans (and sister club Melbourne Knights' fans after the Parramatta game at Somers St last year) because of his Croatian background.

"How can a so called Croatian turn his back on a Croatian club like that?" the masses were asking themselves.

This year that all changed, as the Prodigal Son returned home to a club that was hurting (both on and off the field), determined to help return some of the past glory to the Sydney United he has idolised all his life.

He was returning to the Club he never stopped loving. But were the United fans capable of forgiving and forgetting?

"I didn't really enjoy my short stay at Parramatta," explained Plesa. "I wasn't settled and I had a few niggling injuries for most of the season, so it wasn't an enjoyable stint that's for sure. I was looking to move on, so when I heard United's new coach Alan Hunter might be keen to talk to me, I didn't have to think twice about coming home."

Plesa, a qualified carpenter, still has personal ambitions. One of those is to represent the senior National side having earlier represented Australia at Youth level in 1995.

Another is to see his beloved Sydney United return to the top of the National competition, where it belongs, according to Plesa.

After four rounds of the current season, things looked rosy for Sydney United, Despite all the so-called experts making bold predictions prior to the season that United would see out the 2000/01 season firmly anchored to the bottom of the 16 team competition, rookie coach Alan Hunter's boys appear to be the surprise packets of the league as we enter 2001.

Indeed they were, as the Edensor Park outfit were placed nicely at the top of the competition four games into the new season.

Since then, however, the wheels have buckled as United have slowly but surely started its 'mid-season' slump, having currently slid to a disappointing mid-table position.

The recent derby in Melbourne against sister club the Knights was a personal disappointment for Plesa.

The hordes of United fans who were hoping that this game would signal the return to form of the Bravehearts, were shattered as well — their idols were on the wrong end of a 4-0 scoreline.

What was even worse for the 'Prodigal Son', was that he was given his marching orders in the 60th minute for his second bookable offence.

After missing United's following game, the controversial 1-1 draw against the Brisbane Strikers, Plesa booked a return date against his former teammates, at his old stomping ground, Parramatta Power.

Overcoming a nervous first half, which saw United down 3-0 at the break, the Bravehearts rallied and with old boy Richard Plesa, this time fighting on the 'other side', the underdogs from Edensor Park almost pulled off a miraculous comeback eventually going down 3-2 to the more fancied Power.

However United showed the fighting qualities and spirit that is needed for a good side to become even better — maybe even become champions one day.

It was enough to give the United players hope — especially Plesa who is convinced the team will 'be there' come the business end of the NSL season.

"I am really enjoying my soccer again," explains Plesa, "We have got a really good bunch of guys this year, the atmosphere amongst the boys is excellent and I think it would not be too unrealistic to expect to finish in the top six come season's end.

"We started off well, and our home record has been excellent up until now.

As yet we haven't lost a match at home so we just have to start picking up a few points away from home and we'll be right up there."

Despite the fact that he has been around Australia's elite soccer competition for several years, officially entering the veteran stage after having played his 100th NSL match earlier this year, Plesa is still a relatively young footballer at 24 years of age.

Citing his mother as one of his major influences, Plesa considers two fellow Australian footballers as his most admired soccer players.

Evergreen teammate Velimir Kupresak, who made his comeback from long-term injury earlier this year and just last week notched up his 250th game for the club, is Plesa's most admired Australian based player.

Former Melbourne Knights striker and now Leeds United hero, Mark Viduka, is considered by Plesa to be his most admired Australian playing overseas. In fact he considers the V-Bomber to be his favourite overseas soccer player — full stop.

And like his idol, who in 1995 came back from the World Youth Championships to lead his beloved Knights to their first ever Premiership over Adelaide City in Adelaide, after a short stint in the wilderness, will Richard Plesa return to lead his beloved Sydney United to their first ever flag come next, May?

With the topsy-turvy 2000/01 season so far, anything is possible.

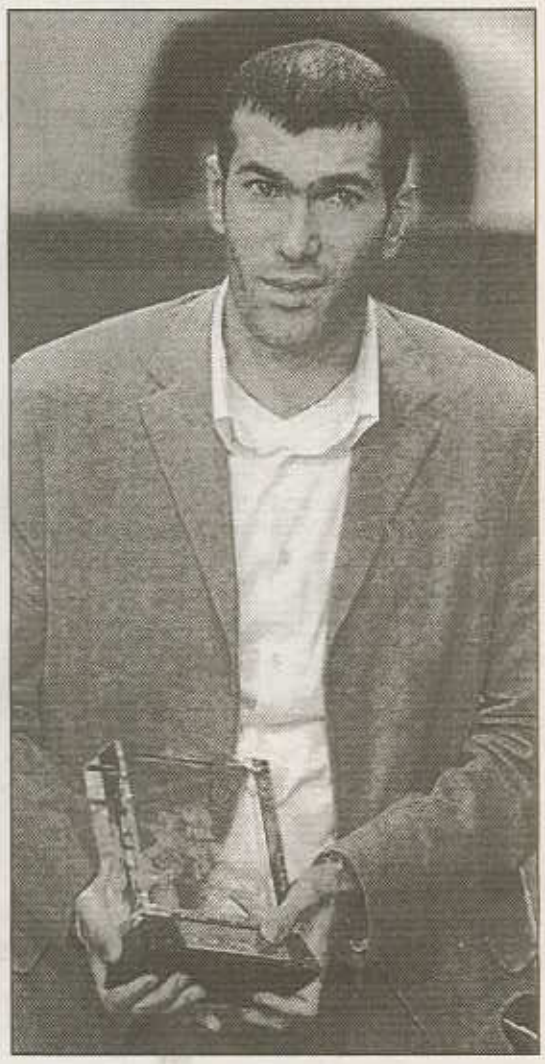
Richard Plesa: Returned back to Sydney United to captain the side this season.

THE BEST OF 2000 —

1999/2000 NSL GRAND FINAL: PERTH GLORY vs WOLLONGONG WOLVES
BEST EVER GRAND FINAL ENDS WITH WOLLONGONG WINNING SHOOT-OUT

June 11 2000: *Wollongong Wolves are crowned the NSL champions for season 1999/2000 after defeating Perth Glory after a tense penalty shoot-out. After falling behind 3-0 at half time, the Wolves completed one of the biggest ever comebacks to level with just a minute remaining. The Glory, in front of over 40,000 home fans had two chances to wrap up the shoot-out but it was the Wolves who took home both the Glory and the trophy.*

WORLD'S BEST PLAYER: ZINEDINE ZIDANE



December 12 2000: *France's Zinedine Zidane is voted the World Player of the Year in 2000 after leading France to European Glory in July.*

AUSTRALIA vs SCOTLAND
AUSTRALIA SECURE FAMOUS WIN

November 15 2000: *Australia cause one of the biggest upsets of the year after downing Scotland away from home 0-2. The win was Australia's first against the Scots.*

OLYMPIC FINAL: CAMEROON vs SPAIN
CAMEROON TASTE FIRST EVER OLYMPIC SUCCESS

September 30 2000: *Cameroon are crowned Olympic champions after defeating Spain in a thrilling final at the Olympic Stadium in Sydney. Trailing 2-0 at the break, the match seemed over however Cameroon did not give in and subsequently equalised midway through the second half at 2-2, before going on to win on penalties.*

HOME AND ABROAD

EURO 2000 FINAL: FRANCE vs ITALY
FRANCE BECOME EURO AND WORLD CHAMPS

July 4 2000: *France celebrate becoming World and European champions after defeating Italy 2-1 in the final of Euro 2000 in Rotterdam thanks to an injury time equaliser and then a golden goal.*

EPL: LEEDS vs LIVERPOOL
VIDUKA BAGS FOUR

November 5 2000: *Australian Mark Viduka completes an amazing match as he bags all four goals to down Liverpool 4-3 at Elland Road.*

REAL MADRID vs VALENCIA
REAL CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GLORY

May 24 2000: *Raul (pictured) leads Real Madrid to their eighth Champions League trophy after downing Valencia 3-0.*

BOCA JUNIORS vs REAL MADRID
PALERMO DOUBLE SINKS MADRID

November 28 2000: *South American champions Boca Juniors are crowned World Club Champions for 2000 after downing Real Madrid 2-1 in the Toyota Cup in Japan. A double to Martin Palermo was enough to help Boca to win the trophy, the first such win for a South American side in six years and the first time since 1977.*

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE

Match Reports page 10 & 11

ABSW Player of the Year Points

ROUND TWELVE

PARRAMATTA vs NORTHERN SPIRIT
3 - Elrich (PP)
2 - J. Griffiths (PP)
1 - Burgess (NS)

NEWCASTLE vs SYDNEY UNITED
3 - Wilson (NU)
2 - Genc (SU)
1 - Dodd (NU)

WOLLONGONG vs EASTERN PRIDE
3 - Chipperfield (WW)
2 - Middleby (WW)
1 - Roach (EP)

BRISBANE vs ADELAIDE CITY
3 - Rech (BS)
2 - Harris (BS)
1 - Shroj (BS)

CANBERRA vs FOOTBALL KINGZ
3 - Campbell (FK)
2 - Rufer (FK)
1 - Angelucci (CC)

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS vs PERTH
3 - Milicevic (PG)
2 - Porter (MK)
1 - Marth (MK)

SOUTH MELB vs SYDNEY OLYMPIC
3 - Kalogerakos (SM)
2 - Juric (SO)
1 - Kisnorbo (SM)

MARCONI STALLIONS
BYE

The Progressive player points for the 2000/2001 ABSW Player of the Year award will be hidden with the winner to be released at season's end.

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE

PARRAMATTA 3
NORTHERN SPIRIT 0

By John Economos

Three second half goals scored in the space of 10 minutes, enabled the Parramatta Power to steam over the top of visiting Northern Spirit last Friday evening at the Parramatta Stadium in front of a healthy crowd of just over 8,000.

The first session ended scoreless with the Spirit having little luck in front of the target, but a fully rejuvenated Power steamed ahead in the second session to grab all three precious League points for the fifth time in their last six outings.

The Power opened the scoring in the 63rd minute when left midfielder and newly signed from Blacktown City, Damien Brown, slammed a rebound with a low left footed drive into the far corner after first Brown, then Joel Griffiths had their initial shots blocked.

Five minutes later English towering import central defender, David Lee, doubled the scoreline when he exploded to hammer a rebound into the target following a Milan Blagojevic free kick.

With the Spirit now reeling on the ropes, import striker Joe Miller trebled the scoreline in the 73rd minute. Following a corner from the right, Lee struck a violent flat goal-bound drive that Power defender Joe Vrkic turned to Miller who was able to flick into the target and finally knock out the Spirit.

Joel Griffiths: The Power's mobile striker.

The Power's dynamic right flanker Ahmad Elrich, having an excellent game, denied himself a real match bonus. Breaking through the middle to get into a one-on-one situation with the Spirit goalie Paul Henderson, saw his effort clip the horizontal 12 minutes from the bell.

The Spirit's player coach and former international Graham Arnold, limped off after only 38 minutes having sustained a knock to his quad muscle in a hefty collision with a team mate.

With Arnold's huge experience and organisational skills missing after his departure, and coming from the sweeper's role, the Spirit lost much direction.

The Power's mobile striker Joel Griffiths, started to make some great and unselfish inroads which terrorised the Spirit backline.

The Spirit's lanky and fiery defender, Paul Bilokapic, rattled the horizontal with his free kick after 34 minutes, a lucky escape for the Power.

Power's coach David Mitchell, shifted his giant central marker Joe Vrkic square across to the right side in an endeavour to neutralise the lethal crosses from Matthew Langdon which in fact came at a great premium in the second session.

Best performers for the home side were right flanker Ahmad Elrich, Joel Griffiths, left flanker and new signing, Damien Brown, whilst for the Spirit, giant target man Ben Burgess, Matthew Langdon and Michael Cunico all did very well.

Parramatta Power's Damien Brown (left) Northern Spirit defender Scott Thomas fight for the ball.

The Power's coach, David Mitchell, (as always), was low key about his team's excellent performance, stating: "In the first half we were scrappy, but lifted ourselves up a gear in the second. It was good to see the crowd turn up and see a really good game.

"I was pleased for big David Lee who came into the side and Ahmad (Elrich), was a class act and will go all the way."

Meanwhile the Spirit's coach Graham Arnold, evaluated: "I thought it was a high quality game and one of the best of the season. I also felt that we had no luck in the first 60 minutes. The turning point was when Langdon (Matthew) missed with his toe-poked effort, then after conceding a goal we were out chasing goals.

"There were a lot of positives for me and we should have back next week-end ('Chi Chi') Mendez and hopefully Troy Cranney," ended Arnold.

BRISBANE STRIKERS 6
ADELAIDE CITY 2

By Glenn Davis

Brisbane Strikers savoured one of its best performances in five seasons at Suncorp Stadium to its last game when it thrashed Adelaide City 6-2 in a stunning farewell last Saturday night.

Spearheaded by Brazilian ace Fernando Rech, who netted his first NSL hat-trick and a double from Jeromy Harris, the Strikers left Suncorp Stadium for the hallowed turf of rugby's Ballymore in fine style in a sometimes spiteful encounter.

Stand-in referee John Peacock, controlling his first national league match after original referee Mark Shields took ill, was forced to send off defender Jade North (Strikers) and Nathan Day (Adelaide) late in the game after an ugly melee.

The Strikers dominated from the outset and could have been several goals up at the break but surprisingly led only 1-0 at halftime following a 22 minute penalty from Paul Foster.

Rech stamped his mark on the game within five minutes of the second half and easily earned man of the match honours blasting two goals a minute apart to set up the home side with a commanding 3-0 lead.

Adelaide, who had been the form side of the competition in recent weeks, showed some fight back when Brad Hassell pegged a goal back in the 54th minute heading home from close range after a series of rebounds in a congested box.

Rech again played his part in the Strikersí fourth goal setting up Harris ten minutes later on the edge of the area for the first of his double.

Again the visitors clawed back to 4-2 in the 75th minute giving them some fighting hope when Scott Tunbridge pounced on a loose ball and easily beat Strikersí keeper Danny Duke.

However, the Strikers snuffed out any thoughts of an Adelaide fightback within a minute when Rech tucked away his third to put the visitors' into a death roll.

Harris' double and the Strikers sixth came in the 78th minute when he clashed with Adelaide keeper Adrian Cagalj.

With both players spreadeagled on the ground Harris managed to stretch out with his leg to toe poke home his double just as the Adelaide keeper looked like gathering in the loose ball.

The Strikers now must endure a month-long stretch on the road before they return to play their first Friday night home match against Newcastle at Ballymore on February 2.

Brisbane Strikers' Wayne Srhoj evades the tackle of Adelaide City's Aurelio Vidmar.

CANBERRA COSMOS 0
FOOTBALL KINGZ 2

By Graham Cooke

The Football Kingz gained their first National Soccer League win outside New Zealand this season — and against a spiritless Canberra Cosmos did not have to work hard for the 2-0 margin.

Kingz assistant coach Shane Rufer said the team are improving all the time, but improvement was hardly necessary with the Cosmos' recent form suggesting their players already feel the club are on death row.

There were a few good moments for the sprinkling of home fans.

Early on Jon Angelucci, surrounded by defenders and almost out of options, tried a delicate chip which sailed just wide of the upright with goalkeeper Simon Eaddy scrambling.

And in stoppage time, when all was lost anyway, substitute Naoki Imaya used all his power to blast a shot goalwards. It was also wide.

Cosmos coach Tom Sermanni summed up most of the remainder of the game when he said his team were out-muscled, out-competed and outplayed.

Shane Rufer: Says the Kingz are beginning to play with greater confidence.

Ivan Vicelich: Scored the second for the Kingz to wrap up a comfortable 2-0 win.

"At no stage did we play like a team that had any confidence, or with an individual who was willing to take responsibility," he said.

Both Kingz' goals came from aggressive runs which were too good for the Cosmos defence. No-one got near Dennis Ibrahim when he put away his 33rd minute goal, and big Ivan Vicelich treated a couple of half-hearted challenges with contempt as he carved into the penalty area to slip his shot under the diving body of goalkeeper Angelo Konstantinou 16 minutes from the end.

Shane Rufer said the Kingz were beginning to play with greater confidence.

"We have become more compact and tighter and have cut out most of the mental blackouts which plagued us early on," he said.

"If we can carry on in that mode we will improve our position on the table."

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE

SOUTH MELBOURNE 1
SYDNEY OLYMPIC 0

By Alan Clark

Vaughan Coveny's 13th minute shot on the turn was enough to give South Melbourne the points in a tough and tight contest against Sydney Olympic at Bob Jane Stadium last Saturday, allowing the Lakesiders to retain their position at the top of the table.

Coveny's goal was reward for South's early ascendancy. Vas Kalogeracos— making a rare start in a South shirt since his transfer from Perth Glory — had set it up with a cross from the right. Coveny immediately ran towards the grandstand, patting his newly-shaved skull in celebration.

Nick Carle had Olympic's best chance to level just after the half-hour, when his goal-bound header from inside the six-yard box was touched over at the last by South's in-form keeper Michael Petkovic.

"I tell you what," challenged Olympic coach Branko Culina after the game.

"If you've seen a better save than Petkovic's from Nicky Carle's header — show us it."

Carle's header came after an incisive move up the right and a cross from Greg Owens, which stretched the threadbare South defence.

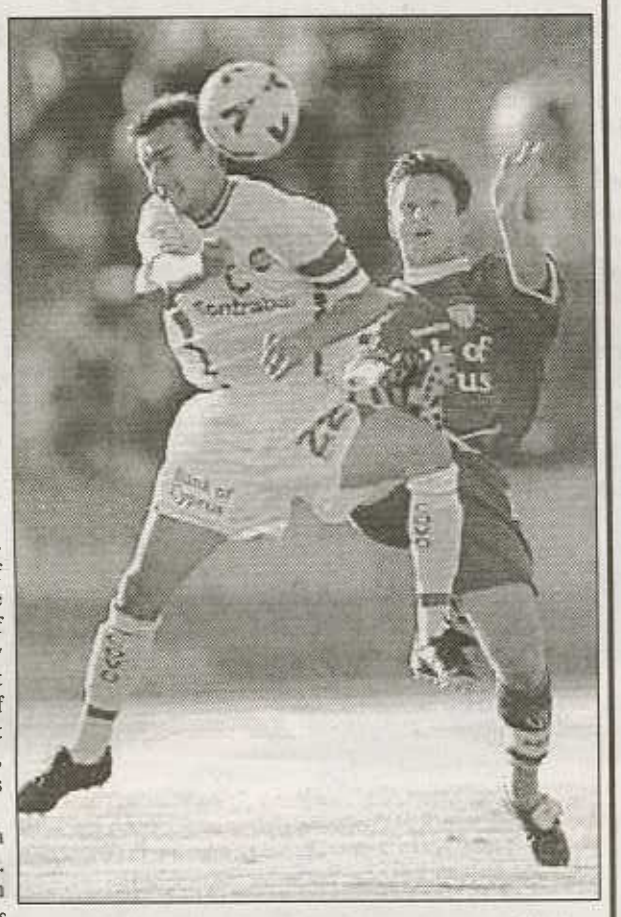
Carle again had an opportunity to level midway through the second half when he was set free at the edge of the penalty-area, but Petkovic was quick off his line, and was involved in a four-way collision which caused Mehmet Durakovic's replacement. Carle himself needed several minutes of treatment before being able to return to the fray, and Fausto De Amicis as well as Petkovic also needed attention.

"(Mehmet's) alright," said South coach Micky Petersen after the game. "He just keeps getting whacked about on the head. He can't help himself — it's just his endeavour and his attack on the ball that lands him in a lot of trouble. It's bravery and commitment."

"I expected more from our guys," said Culina. "I thought we would close (them) down a lot better. But South Melbourne showed what a good side they are. They were just smarter, with more experienced players."

"South Melbourne had six or seven leaders on the park - we had one or two."

South coach Mike Petersen agreed with Culina's assessment, adding, "I thought it was one of the better games. Both teams were very fit, hard at it, and looking to play. I love seeing good football, and tonight's was a good game."



Sydney Olympic's Peter Zorbas fights to keep South Melbourne's Steve Panopoulos from the ball.

NEWCASTLE UNITED 1
SYDNEY UNITED 1

By Greg Danvers

Sydney United were gifted a point off the head of Newcastle skipper Glenn Sprod in the dying minutes of a tough and physical encounter at Marathon Stadium last Friday night in front of 8,305 Novocastrians.

Newcastle and Sydney drew one-all in a match that Sydney coach Alan Hunter believes his was the better side while Newcastle mentor Lee Sterrey will be ordering talk time at training this week.

"Quite simply we were the better side," Hunter told the media at the post match press conference.

Newcastle went to the front after 52 minutes through a penalty converted by John Buonavoglia, only his second goal of the season and both from the spot.

Sydney gained the point in the 89th minute when a goalmouth mix up between Sprod and 'keeper Bob Catlin went horribly wrong. Sprod headed over Catlin and into the net.

Alan Hunter: Says his team were unlucky.

"You can't be copping a goal like that at that stage of the match," lamented Sterrey.

"At the end of the day it came back to (the lack of) communication.

"If there was good communication there Glenn Sprod should have known where everyone was on the park and Bobby Catlin should have certainly been talking.

"It was cruel not to get the three points."

Newcastle had the better of the chances throughout the first half of the match with four clear chances, to nil, in the first 20 minutes.

Three minutes into the match Buonavoglia combined with Travis Dodd who turned on the ball and rifled a shot wide of goal. Two minutes later Buonavoglia and Daniel McBreen worked a one-two for McBreen to cross to an unmarked Peter Tsekenis whose powerful header, from just inside the box, went wide.

Non-stop midfielder Mark Wilson was almost on the end of a Sprod curling corner ten minutes later and in the next minute Buonavoglia miscued a Brad Wieczorek cross that he should have left for Wilson.

Sydney's only answer to the advancing Newcastle side was to kick them off the park, three yellow cards were issued by referee Matthew Breeze in the first half as the match threatened to erupt as tempers flared.

Glenn Sprod: Unlucky own goal in the last minute.

Novocastrian Danny Burt, on loan from Broadmeadow Magic to Sydney, made sure Newcastle strikers McBreen and Buonavoglia knew he was there with some over exuberant tackles, the first in the opening minute on McBreen.

"It was great to see some passion out there," Hunter said.

Esala Masi, after seven weeks out with a knee injury, was injected into the match after 57 minutes and one minute later was booked for a crude tackle on Burt. Sitting on the sideline and watching his teammates hacked by Sydney had the Fijian International all fired up by the time he got into the match.

Sydney had an opportunity to square the ledger in the 65th minute but for Commins Menapi not having a left foot. Three times, with only Catlin to beat, Menapi unsuccessfully tried to get the ball on the right foot to shoot. Todd McManus finally shutting down the play.

With two minutes of regulation time, and Sydney pressing forward, Younis missed a sitter. Richard Plesa, on the far right, overhead kicked the ball across the face of goal only to see Younis volley the ball wide of an open goal.

Then disaster for Newcastle as Sprod nodded the ball into his own net.

"We easily deserved the point," Hunter added.

"They probably had two chances and that included the penalty but I thought we were the better side.

"We created more chances in the last 20 minutes and had Ray (Younis) scored that volley we would have won it."

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS 1
PERTH GLORY 1

By Tonci Prusac

A rejuvenated Melbourne Knights, strengthened by the inclusion of three former Carlton SC players, shared the points in an entertaining Round 12 NSL encounter as they drew 1-1 with Perth Glory at Knights Stadium last Saturday.

In front of just under 5,000 spectators in almost perfect conditions, the Knights held the ascendency for most of the game but were unable to fully capitalise on their numerous chances.

This proved decisive in the end as the home team, which included newly appointed captain Andrew Marth and two of his fellow former Carlton stalwarts in Ljubo Lapsansky and Daniel Vasilevski, rued several open chances late in the game.

Had the Knights capitalised on their chances the Reds would have taken all three points against the high flying Glory. Unfortunately, both teams had to settle for a 1-1 draw.

The Knights started off the more attacking side when in the 4th minute, dynamic midfielder Andy Vargas broke clear and latched onto a shot that went just wide of the post.

In the 13th minute, against the run of play, Glory sweeper Ljubo Milicevic opened the scoring when he broke clear and his shot flew past Knights' keeper Lou Acevski.

The boisterous crowd didn't have to wait long for an equaliser. Striker Joel Porter, who was one of the better players in the first half for the Knights, broke clear after intercepting a Glory defender's back pass.

He dribbled towards the goals then at the last instant flicked a delightful pass out wide to his striking partner Toto Da Costa who made no mistake.

Melbourne Knights' Joel Porter is challenged by Perth Glory defender Ljubo Milicevic.

In the second half, the Knights looked the more dangerous outfit on the park. Once again goal scoring opportunities were plentiful but the goals themselves weren't.

The best opportunity of the second stanza came when captain Andrew Marth headed the ball into the back of the net past Glory keeper Jason Petkovic in the 62nd minute, only for the linesman to rule offside.

WOLLONGONG WOLVES 4
EASTERN PRIDE 2

By Otto Bader

Goals galore in light rain at WIN Stadium in front of a good crowd of 4,107 last Friday night as Scott Chipperfield bagged a hat-trick as the Wolves defeated Eastern Pride 4-2.

The game was only five minutes old when Chipperfield received a fine-cut pass from his team mate Dino Mennillo to hammer the ball into the net for a 1-0 lead.

Paul Reid made it 2-0 in the 18th minute when captain Matt Horsley laid the ball off for his midfielder to strike it sweet.

An error by Wolves defender Alvin Ceccoli allowed Eastern Pride to steal the ball and striker Neville Roach — who had a fine game — raced towards goal and slotted the ball past a desperate Wolves keeper Grant Barlow to reduce the score to 2-1 which was also the half time score.

In the second part the Wolves carried on with their attacking style, even though some sloppy passing gave a few too many balls away. In the 65th minutes Chipperfield made it 3-1 off a fine pass from Sasho Petrovski — who came on for Stuart Young in the 52nd minute — finishing well.

Daniel Watkins: Scored the final goal for Pride.

A penalty awarded to the Wolves — rather soft looking from the side line — was wasted by Petrovski, an easy save for the keeper.

However the Eastern Pride also were guilty of missing from the spot shortly after being awarded a spot kick following a harmless tackle from Ceccoli.

The miss may have been the turning point of the match as John Hutchinson's effort was saved by Barlow.

Minutes later the home team was awarded another penalty for pushing in the box and this time Chipperfield stepped up to convert confidently to a 4-1 score.

Scott Chipperfield: Bagged a hat-trick against the Pride.

In the final minutes a free-kick from Eastern Pride found the head of Daniel Watkins for the final score of 4-2, the Wolves keeper missing the ball which came to him a some pace.

Wolves coach Ron Corry was satisfied with the win however critical of poor defending at times with the team playing well in patches and missing too many chances.

Eastern Pride coach Jeff Hopkins was a sad looking figure, seeing his side destroyed by a well oiled machine, also admitting the Wolves were one of the best sides he has witnessed this season.

NICK CARLE

(Sydney Olympic)

OLYMPIC TO HOST UNITED IN SYDNEY DERBY

By John Economos

Sydney Olympic who last Saturday night went down 1-0 to the League's crack side South Melbourne, will be extra keen to bounce back on the winning trail when they clash with Sydney United this Sunday night at the Belmore Sports Ground.

But Olympic could be struggling as two of their strikers, (Nick Carle and Greg Owens), will be on national duty in a training camp this Sunday with the Australian Youth squad.

Even if Carle is released from the Youth training squad by national coach Angie Postecoglou for Olympic's match on Sunday, he still may not be fit to play.

Scotty Baillie: Sydney Olympic Vice Captain

No Strikers

Olympic's vice-captain, Scotty Baillie, stated to ABSW last night: "Nicky, (Carle), last Saturday night sustained a double injury in our Big Match against Souths.

"He suffered a fractured bone to his hand, as well as some concussion, when he heavily collided with Souths' central defender Mehmet Durakovic," Baillie said.

The Olympic tough as teak central marker then went on to add:

"After the match Carle was rushed to hospital in Melbourne where his hand was set in plaster.

"So things don't look too good for Nicky right now," ended Baillie.

Should Carle be ruled out either way, striker Pablo Cardozo could be partnered up front with Owens dragged out of the midfield and pushed into the attack-line.

Nicky Carle: Olympic's star striker in action against South Melbourne last Saturday night wrecked between South's David Clarkson with Con Boutsianis in the background.

If midfielder Kresimir Marusic is finally back from injury and is fit to play, the Olympic playmaker would slot in and plug up the gap left behind by Owens.

Olympic's two Liberian strikers, Mass Sarr and Andy Amagachie are also out of action due to injuries.

Sarr is still struggling with full fitness whilst Amagachie broke his ankle two weeks ago in the Youth team against the Wollongong Wolves.

The loss against Souths has pushed Olympic down from third spot on the League ladder to fifth position, just behind the Perth Glory who are also on 21 points from 12 games.

Kresimir Marusic: Olympic's playmaker, could be back in action.

However the Glory is just ahead of Olympic with a slightly better goal-difference.

In contrast, Sydney United now sit in ninth position, five League points behind Sunday's opponent, Sydney Olympic.

Olympic came narrowly close to salvaging a 1-1 draw against Souths when ball-playing striker Nick Carle threatened the target with a clever header from point-blank range.

However Souths' international goalkeeper Michael Petkovic was able to twist in mid-air and tip Carle's goal-bound effort away from danger.

Sydney United's veteran central defender Velimir Kupresak, stated to ABSW last night: "Olympic is a good, fast attacking team and a dangerous one.

"If they have their mid-fielders Kresimir Marusic and Troy Halpin back from injury they will be an even more dangerous side for us."

The highly experienced Kupresak did not take the pitch against Newcastle last Friday night as coach Alan Hunter elected to use Ray Younis and Danny Burt as his twin central markers with Richard Plesa sweeping.

Velamir Kupresak: United's experienced central marker.

Sydney United grabbed a last minute 1-1 draw against Newcastle when a late 'own-goal' scored by a Newcastle defender got the Sydney team out of jail.

Sydney Olympic vs Sydney United

Sunday 7th January

AT THE

BELMORE SPORTS GROUND

MAIN GAME — KICK OFF 6.30PM

Branko Culina

Ante Juric

Paul Kohler

Pablo Cardozo

Aytec Genc

Francis Awaritefe

Alan Hunter

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Letters to the Editors

HILL IS NO CLEANSER

Dear Sir,

In your article "Giving Racism a Red Card", Bert Van Bedaf seemed way out of touch in continuing the old argument that the David Hill regime was "anglo-centric" and likening it to "ethnic cleansing".

Obviously it is commendable to speak out against racism wherever it occurs, but first we must understand what "racism" actually is.

Following clubs such as Spirit, Brisbane or Marconi etc., one's colour or country of origin is unimportant, in terms of the way you're treated at the game and in the advertising that gets you there. Are these clubs racist? Obviously not.

David Hill: Not an 'ethnic cleanser'.

And yet these are exactly the clubs David Hill wanted in the league.

Surely by now we would all have to agree that any NSL clubs that limit their appeal to one part of Australia's diverse community are destined for the wall, and will probably take the game with them. The pie is still too small, and cutting it up into tiny pieces is madness.

As our nation celebrates it's 100th birthday, let's hope we can put an end to REAL racism in football (the subject of the majority of Mr Bedaf's otherwise commendable article) and spread the football gospel too.

Rob Child
Riverwood, NSW.

CARLTON FIASCO OVER POINTS

Dear Sir,

Who was the clown at Soccer headquarters who decided that all the NSL teams should be given three points each with a 3-0 scoreline to match, now that Carlton has dropped out.

If they tried that one in the AFL or NRL midway through the season there would be massive protests and legal battles through the courts to match the Super League Wars of a few years back.

If it happened in Britain or Europe there would be riots or even a revolution. No wonder all other Sports are laughing at Soccer in this country, and all other football codes are breathing easy, regardless of how our international teams go.

While there was no easy way of doing things once Carlton collapsed with no perfect way of allocating points, the best and fairest way once 10 rounds have already been decided was to give everybody a one point 0-0 draw including Sydney Olympic who have been the worst affected.

That way only three teams would have gained a slight advantage having lost to Carlton, with Sydney Olympic only slightly disadvantaged for winning theirs, with the other four games played being draws.

You can't blame Olympic for threatening legal action as they had to earn their points the hard way. Look at it this way, if Sydney Olympic lost one or two top line players in that game against Carlton for the rest of the season, or even half the remaining season through injury, would Soccer Australia compensate them financially for there bad luck in having to play a game that today is deemed null and void.

I won't answer that as everyone knows the answer to that.

So unless Soccer Australia Officials can fix up the remainder of the season with my solution (or one better), they might as well employ the chief executives of season's Disneyland to run the rest of this season's NSL competition, who are experts in Mickey Mouse events.

Nick Politis: Sydney Olympic Chairman.

Oh well, at least we have the World Cup qualifiers and other international games involving the Socceroos to look forward to this coming new year.

Dominic Scullino,
Nerang Qld.

ABSW AND OLYMPIC IN THE WRONG

Dear Sir,

Just two quick points for yourself. Firstly Do you think Sydney Olympic can stop their whining over this three points dropped fiasco.

Yes, we all agree with Olympic that once again the so called pros and experts who run the game in this country should have never allowed Carlton to start the year but unfortunely they did, but are now out, so the only logical way to be fair to everyone is to cancel the Carlton results (how everyone gets 3-0 etc is beyond me, why not 0 points no goals etc, its fairer in the end and gives a true for and against ratio but anyway) ... Olympic have only mid distance memories ... it was Olympic who were beaten 2-0 by Sydney City in the 1st game of the season before City dropped out, and yes Olympic, that game was wiped from the records and everyone started fresh.

You don't think that City would have won all 26 fixtures in a row that year do you...so therefore Olympic were advantaged over possibly everyone else so just as was done in the mid eighties, get over it and continue to play the game.

Secondly, ABSW has now entered the realm of Australian political observer, how nice.

Can you please get the chip on the shoulder Mr correct journo B.Van Bedaf to stick to what he knows, which is football, and leave the Australian political and racial climate ,which he hasn't had his head out of the sand long enough to observe, alone ... fancy wasting valuble space in your great paper on an essay on how the players in a park comp 4th div provincial league were verbally abused by their opponents ... once again get over it and please continue to write about important things ie ... football and all its great aspects (which are many) and not things like poor old Ajax Maccabi (do they play in Ajax strips) getting a bit of verbal.

Which lets be honest here, is pretty trivial material to write about in a paper dedicated to soccer as the cover suggests.

Thanks for your time, hope this isn't too strong but I'm passionate about the game and the things surrounding it ... do you think we can forward for a change in Oz soccer instead of regressing as usual, lets hope eh??

Yours in sport
Heath Avery

More Soccer On Seven?

Dear Sir,

If as seems likely Channel 7 losses the AFL TV rights to Foxtel and Nine, Oz soccer could be an unlikely beneficiary.

Having all the TV rights for the three most popular Oz sports controlled by one group is a recipe for trouble. It will take the wisdom of Solomon and more to simultaneously look after the competing TV interests of AFL, league and cricket without disadvantaging at least one of the three.

Each sport expects that their interest will get priority.

This does not take into account one off events like Wimbledon, the World Cup, golf and more.

David Hill may have wrought havoc during his time at SA but the TV contract he signed with seven could prove to be a nice little earner for seven and embrace Oz soccer by giving the game serious coverage on a commercial network for the first time ever.

The Socceroos are becoming increasingly marketable and if they qualify for Japan/Korea, 2002 and do well in the tournament then their marketability will only increase more.

With a bit of luck in the next couple of years alone the Socceroos will earn Channel 7 very nice profits. As for the NSL and domestic soccer in general the prospects are less promising. However there is some hope for improvement and Seven with the half of Grenada UK has the muscle to do something useful.

In the end Seven's reputation and status may be dented by the loss of the AFL TV rights but their bottom line (profits) enhanced by soccer, the game they and all the commercial networks and even the ABC have despised and ignored for more than 40 years.

For Seven to take soccer seriously only as a last resort and then make money out of it because fortunate circumstances is most unjust but that's business I guess.

R Melor,
Bondi, NSW.

Cleanout needed from the top

Dear Sir,

The headlines tell it all. Multi million dollar TV deals for Rugby League and AFL. Increased sponsorship and coverage for these codes and Rubgy Union, Basketball, Cricket, and other sports gaining massive print & electronic media coverage.

What does "The World Game" get ? Sponsorship crumbs and denigration. TV coverage so pathetic as not to be noticed.

Clubs on the brink of collapse,.Legal issues over competition points after one of the "star" sides Carlton follows Adelaide Sharks' slide into oblivion.

New Zealand teams invited to national membership before Australian sides. Clubs arguing over ownership rights and worse.

Let's face it the National Competition is in a shambles and the so-called administrators of Soccer Australia must again hang their heads in Shame.

The exposed criteria for inclusion in the 'restructured' NSL must surely be a joke, once again foisted on Australia's long suffering soccer public by an inept group without a modicum of marketing intelligence.

Instead of getting some cash relief from TV and Marketing like other National Sports competitions, what do our Clubs get? Bills and ultimatums!

Where has the much vaunted bonus from the National Marketing Campaign promised a few years ago when clubs were forced to adopt non ethnic names, symbols, etc.

What benefit has ANY strategy put forward by our peak body delivered to our code.

More than a reduction in the number of NSL.Clubs, we need a 'clean-out' at the top of our administration.

Perhaps the likes of Cosmos ex-chairman Ian Knopp may provide a glimmer of hope for a Soccer Australia board where commercial understanding seems to be an afterthought.

We need the peak bodies to institute a comprehensive survey of the hopes and attitudes of the soccer and general public.

We need a moratorium on change until the findings of such a survey is published.

Never once in 30 plus years as a soccer supporter and executive member of a prominent local soccer Club have I been asked by Soccer Australia my opinion about the directions of the game in this country. And I suspect your readers have had the same experience.

So, if Soccer Australia lacks the resolve and resources to do it perhaps your excellent publication or an internet site (the SBS worldgame site is another excellent example) can do it. Lets poll the people!

Ask them what they think of a reduced competition, why they attend games and support the teams they do, what they're looking for, why they stay away, when they think the best times for matches are, do they purchase soccer related merchandise, play the game, can identify local role models, follow specific soccer news media, etc etc.

Does anyone think, that a reduced competition is going to solve some of the problems soccer, at an elite level, faces at the moment, such as; poor crowds and media coverage, younger players seeking their fame and fortune overseas, a stark absence of national marketing and sponsorship, (whatever happened to the bonanza a New Zealand team was supposed to deliver ?), and a critical loss of players and supporters, of our hugely strong Junior Code, to other sports codes in their mid to late teen ages.

Why not invite your readers to suggest survey questions? Someone must do it. Soccer Australia will not.

Arthur Huggins.
Ngunnawal, ACT

Bring in Kennett

Dear Sir,

Why not draft Jeff Kennett (former Victorian Premier) to replace Basil Scarella. Isn't it time for somebody in authority (supposedly) who is not an incompetent recycled time server or, a self seeking opportunist.

After David Hill and George Negus the argument against high profile outsiders is strong. However Kennett has a track record in Victoria in dealing with soccer that has been fruitful and amicable.

As well unlike many current and would be soccer administrators Kennett actually likes the game.

Finally being a high profile Victorian he would generate more positive publicity and awareness of soccer in that state and doesn't it need it after the Carlton debacle.

With Scarella moving on it would also be timely for Neville Wran to call it a day at South Australia. I have always admired him as a politician.

Unfortunately he was never able to impose his considerable skills to good effect on Oz soccer.

Jeff Kennett: Former Victorian Premier.

Perhaps part of the reason lay in the fact he had only a passing interest in the game. At aged 74 going on 75 he is well past retirement age based on his abysmal, performance as a soccer administrator.

Before he retires I hope he can spare enough time to take in at least one NSL game. It may be a bit of an endurance test for him but very sobering to how that some people actually pay to watch NSL matches on a regular basis.

Finally a related question for the readers of ABSW. Why is it that the hierarchy of AFL, rugby league and union regularly attend matches of there respective codes.

Yet the hierarchy of Oz soccer rarely if ever attend NSL except big match special events. This by the way is not a recent trend and doesn't it tell everyone (with an ounce of brains) why things are what they are with soccer in Australia.

R Melor,
Bondi, NSW.

NSW Premier League

ROUND 7

CANTERBURY WIN NINE GOAL THRILLER

Canterbury	5
Leichhardt	4

Canterbury Marrickville ended up the better side of a nine-goal thriller at Henson Park last Friday night to defeat the Leichhardt Tigers by 5-4 in a cracking match.

In the highest scoring match of the year to date, a hat trick to Con Paradisis in the space of 15 minutes helped the home side to secure a valuable three points.

The win lifted the home side above Leichhardt and into sixth spot, three points ahead of Leichhardt in eight.

The Tigers started brightly in last Friday's match, so much so that with five minutes remaining in the first half, they lead 2-0.

After a tight opening 38 minutes, Daniel Borg popped up to steer one home with seven minutes in the first half to break the deadlock.

The Tigers, not content with one goal, pushed forward and doubled their advantage two minutes later when Hoenselaars made it 0-2.

The home side, despite finding themselves two goals down, pulled their socks up and turned in a scintillating next 42 minutes, in which they bagged all five of their goals.

Hero Con Paradisis, bagged his first of three in the 42nd minute to make it 1-2 before doubling his goal tally and leveling the scores just on half time.

Five minutes into the second half, the home side took the lead as Yane Talcevski netted to give Canterbury Marrickville their first lead of the night 3-2.

Paradisis was not going to be taken out of the spotlight and in the 57th minute, he stamped his authority on the match as he completed his hat trick to give his side a 4-2 lead.

When Talcevski made it 5-2 in the 82nd minute, the match as a contest seemed over however the match was to take yet another twists.

Lal grabbed two goals in the space of five minutes, the first after 85 minutes and the second right before full time to pull the margin back to 5-4, however a rampaging Tigers outfit had time against them, as the whistle blew to early for their liking.

The win, Canterbury Marrickville's third of the season, lifts them to tem points, level with St George while Tigers sit alone of seven points, and two spots from the cellar.

MARCONI DOWN LEICHHARDT TIGERS IN FRIENDLY

NSW Premier League side the Leichhardt Tigers, played a friendly match last Saturday night against NSL side Marconi at the Marconi Stadium.

Playing without five regular first graders, the Tigers put up a good fight before gallantly succumbing 3-1 to the NSL team.

Marconi last weekend had a bye due to the demise of Carlton from the NSL and Head coach Eddie Krncevic relished the opportunity to give his team a gallop against the Tigers.

Marconi's newly signed striker Archie Thompson, had his first run with his new team and even scored a goal.

Thompson also had a hand in setting up another.

Marconi's other two goals came from striker Kris Trajanovski and robust midfielder Darren McDonald.

Les de Celis: The Leichhardt Tigers' coach.

The Tigers hit back in the second half with a penalty scored by Sam La Rocca.

• RESULTS •

Friday 29 December

Canterbury Marrickville (Con Paradisis 42'/45'/57 Yane Tacevski 50'/82	5
Leichhardt Tigers (Daniel Borg 38, Hoenselaars 40, Lal 85/90)	4

• TOP SCORERS •

AFTER ROUND 7

Player	Club	Goals
Steve Lazzari	Belconnen	10
Darren Iocca	Blacktown City	8
Javier Mancino	Bonnyrigg	6
Niko Joseski	Parramatta Eagles	4
Colin Luff	Bonnyrigg	4

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE LADDER

(AFTER ROUND 7)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Blacktown City	7	6	1	0	15	4	**19**
Bonnyrigg	7	4	2	1	20	8	**14**
Parramatta	7	4	1	2	13	13	**13**
Belconnen	7	4	0	3	15	10	**12**
St George	7	3	1	3	11	12	**10**
Canterbury M'ville	7	3	1	3	9	12	**10**
Central Coast	7	3	0	4	8	8	**9**
Leichhardt	7	2	1	4	14	16	**7**
Sutherland	7	0	3	4	6	15	**3**
Penrith	7	0	2	5	5	18	**2**

For further information see: www.nswpremierleague.com

NSW Premier League

NSW Premier League

www.nswpremierleague.com

SATURDAY 6 JANUARY

Belconnen Blue v Leichhardt *Under 19s: 4.30pm*	**WEST BELCONNEN SG** *First Grade: 6.30pm*
St George v Central Coast	**ST GEORGE STADIUM**
Blacktown City v Bonnyrigg	**GABBIE STADIUM**
Sutherland v C'bury M'ville	**SEYMOUR SHAW**
Penrith v Parramatta Eagles *Under 19s: 5.00pm*	**ANDREW ROAD FIELD** *First Grade: 7.00pm*

"NSW Premier League re-commences on Saturday 6 January 2001"

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SOUTH AMERICA: YEAR IN REVIEW

CLUBS SHINE AND CLAIM GLORY

Boca Juniors captain Jorge Bermudez lifts the trophy after beating Real Madrid in the 21st Toyota Cup in Japan.

South American soccer gave a show of strength in 2000, overcoming perpetual financial difficulties and sometimes chaotic administration.

Pele and Diego Maradona shared FIFA's Player of the Century award, Argentina's Hernan Crespo and Gabriel Batistuta were involved in two of the year's three biggest transfers, Brazil stayed top of FIFA's world rankings and South American clubs walked off with two world titles.

The world double was the most unexpected, as South American clubs are seen as poor relations to their richer European counterparts.

But Brazil's Corinthians then Argentina's Boca Juniors upset the odds.

Corinthians left the multi-million dollar teams of Real Madrid and Manchester United in their wake as they lifted FIFA's inaugural world club championship in January.

Boca outplayed Real Madrid last November to deservedly win the Intercontinental Cup, the annual meeting of the champions of Europe and South America.

Yet South American club football continues to struggle for recognition.

Neither Boca's inspirational midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme or veteran Brazilian striker Romario were included in the top three nominations for FIFA's Player of the Year award.

Romario, seen by many Brazilians as the only true genius still in action, played some of the best football of his career, scoring a club record 65 goals for Vasco da Gama.

CLUBS RULE THE ROOST

The club scene was dominated by Boca who won the treble of South American Libertadores Cup, Argentine Apertura championship and the Intercontinental trophy.

Olimpia won the Paraguayan championship for the fourth consecutive year while Universidad de Chile and Univesitario made it three in a row in Chile and Peru respectively.

Univesitario were helped by a record-breaking 37 goals from Brazilian Eduardo Esidio, who has played on despite testing positive for HIV two years ago.

Olmedo became the first provincial side to win Ecuador's national championship since it began in 1959. The country's most popular club, Barcelona, narrowly avoided relegation.

Other major sides to struggle included Alianza Lima in Peru, Colo Colo in Chile and Brazil's Corinthians who, after winning the world club championship, dismantled their team and in October suffered a club record 10 straight defeats.

Penarol and Nacional took their old and bitter rivalry to new heights in Uruguay when nine players — six from Penarol and three from Nacional — spent a week in jail after brawling at the end of their derby. Nacional went on to win the title.

Corinthian players celebrate winning the World Club Championships at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro last January.

BRAZILIANS INVESTIGATED

It was not the only time FIFA slipped on a South American banana skin.

Soccer's world governing body was perceived as an interfering bully when it threatened to suspend Brazil from the 2002 World Cup after the country's congress began investigating alleged corruption in the domestic game.

Brazilians, who were sick of mismanagement of their national sport and welcomed the probe, were outraged by the threat.

The investigation was a dominant theme in the second half of the year as congressmen voted to open the bank accounts of clubs, directors and federations for public viewing.

Former national team coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, one of the central figures targeted, has already had his accounts exposed in public.

In November, he was interrogated by one of the two commissions of inquiry, which revealed that he had earned $9 million in five years. Asked to justify this income, Luxemburgo repeatedly claimed he was "disorganised" and at the end was told his explanations had been unconvincing.

Luxemburgo was sacked by Brazil in September after their dream of a first Olympic soccer gold was ended by nine-man Cameroon.

The defeat followed poor performances and results with the senior team, who lost World Cup qualifiers away to Chile and Paraguay earlier in the year.

Three other national team coaches lost their jobs in 2000.

Colombia's Javier Alvarez was first to go after a 9-0 defeat by Brazil in the Olympic qualifying tournament in January.

Luis Augusto Garcia stepped in and immediately transformed Colombia into a tight, defensive team.

Peru dismissed Colombian Francisco Maturana following a series of defeats, which wrecked their hopes of qualifying for the World Cup.

Nine losses in 10 games cost Argentine Omar Pastoriza his job in charge of Venezuela.

As the qualifiers took a break in November, Argentina and Brazil, who recovered from earlier setbacks with successive wins over Bolivia, Venezuela and Colombia, seemed poised to progress.

Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador and Colombia were the top contenders for the remaining two places.

Gabriel Batistuta: Big money move from Fiorentina to Roma.

Wanderley Luxemburg: Dismissed as Brazilian coach after Brazil's failure at the Olympics.

SOUTHGATE WANTS ONE WAY TICKET OUT OF VILLA PARK

Gareth Southgate, the man remembered for that penalty miss during the 1996 European Championship semi-final against Germany is ready to pack his bags and depart Aston Villa. However the club seem unwilling to let go of the talented defender.

Transfer-seeking Gareth Southgate wants Aston Villa to name the price they would accept for him.

England's stylish defender declares: "They just will not tell me what they want. They will not be tied down to a figure. I've seen £10 million quoted and if that's the case I can't see a club paying it."

Southgate does gain comfort from the fact that he no longer attracts abuse from the Aston Villa fans. And he has now even come to symbolise their own frustrations.

His reasons for wanting a move have, in fact, gathered sympathy from supporters — and manager John Gregory.

"To begin with I was getting a fair bit of stick after asking for a move last summer," explained Southgate, who drew a bid from Chelsea and is now a target for West Ham as a replacement for £18 million Rio Ferdinand.

"It has changed since then because they see things as I do. They want the club to show more ambition. And the manager has gone public about not being given money to strengthen the squad.

"I've nothing against Villa. I've given the same total commitment to the club over the last five or six months. I am satisfied with the level of my performance. I just want to be as successful as I can. I must do what I feel is best for me and my career.

"I have never said I wouldn't change my mind. Yet in my view it's up to the club to persuade me that they share my ambition. Now I've hit 30 it's an important time for me.

"Lots of clubs and players would be happy with results at Villa. We've always been in or around the top six in the Premiership. At another stage of my life I might have been content. Yet they don't seem prepared to take the next step forward. To go for it. Until they do I can't see my opinion changing.

"The speculation doesn't bother me. It's a good exercise. You have to focus hard on your game to blot out distractions.

"I know it's a strange situation at the moment with the uncertainty over changes in the transfer system.

"I thought when they cashed in on Ugo Ehiogu, selling him to Middlesbrough, they might do the same with me, but nothing has happened.

"Anyway, I don't think any changes will come into force for a year or so. I can't see it making a lot of difference.

"I had long talks with the manager at the time of my transfer request. I knew there had been enquiries from English and foreign clubs. There is no problem between us."

The articulate Southgate, always rated the model professional, was never going to become obstructive.

"If I had been the sort of person to kick up a real stink and mess them about I might have been sold," admits Southgate. "Players have done it in the past. But I would never do that."

Southgate's honesty and character has been tested but never questioned. He still nurses the words of former England coach Terry Venables after that penalty miss in Euro 96.

"He told me: 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger', and I've never forgotten that," reflects Southgate. "It's something you can apply to so many things in life, let alone football. Don't fold.

"I will always be synonymous with that penalty. It always comes up in interviews."

Southgate was one of the few experienced England internationals selected by caretaker coach Peter Taylor for the match against Italy in Turin last month.

"It was rather strange," he conceded. "You're used to having older people around you but I was determined to help everybody out, either players or coaching staff. I want to be around the England scene for a long time yet.

At least for the next European Championships, which is four years away."

Like so many others Southgate, who has won 41 caps, would have welcomed the return of Venables after the departure of Kevin Keegan.

"My views were the same as most people in that I would have liked an Englishman in the job," he says.

"I would have relished Terry getting it. He was the best I have worked with. But if the FA felt the right man wasn't available I've no problem with seeing Sven Goran Eriksson appointed.

"A lot has been said about previous regimes but I've always felt the mood in the England camp has been good.

"I was grateful to Glenn Hoddle for sticking with me after Euro 96 because I was going through an indifferent spell with my club.

"I thought it was sad he went for something that had nothing to do with football.

"We always felt that Kevin Keegan was a players' man. He was tremendously honest about himself. Yet ultimately no-one enjoys losing."

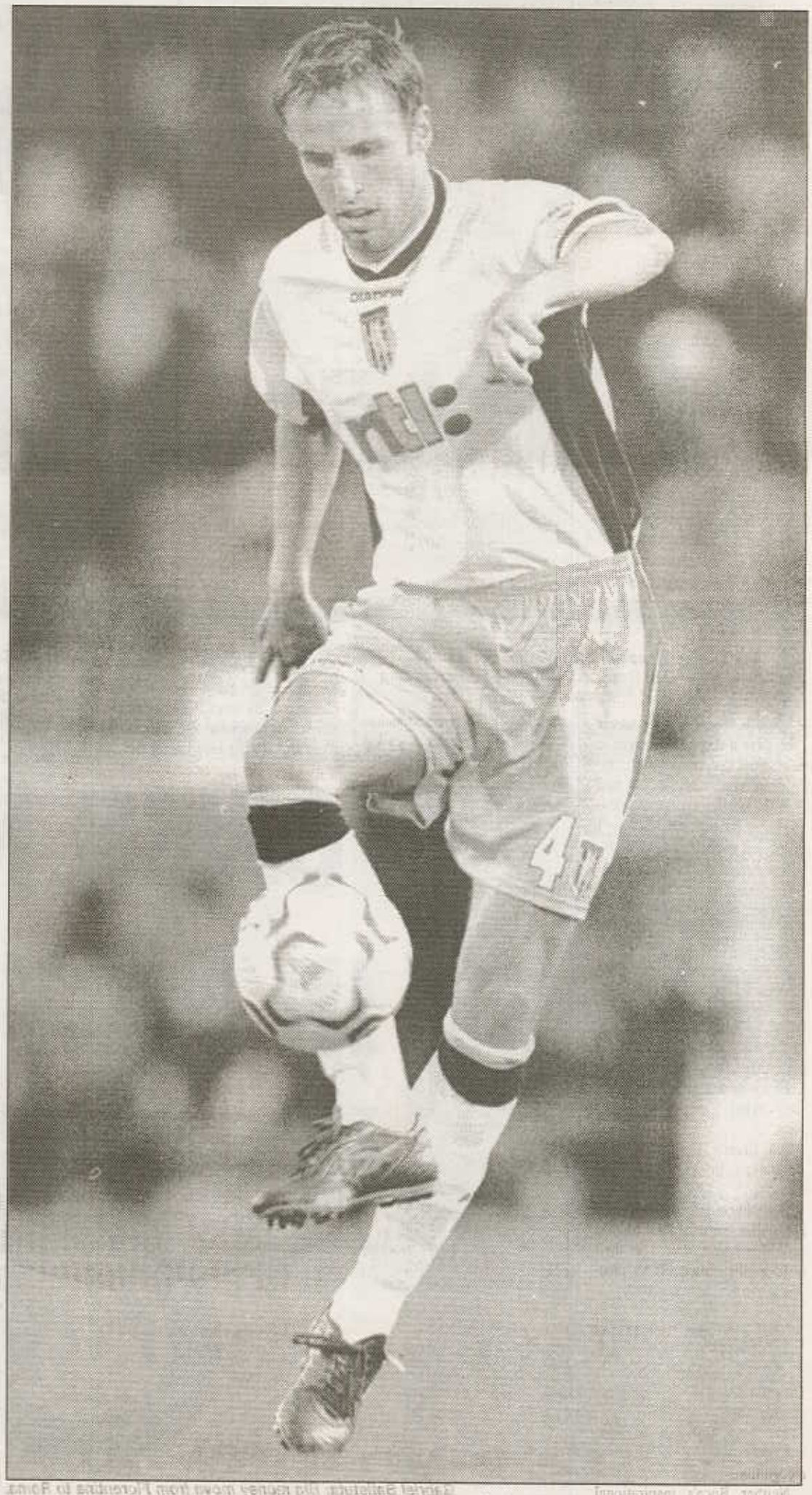
Southgate remains the same affable but single-minded individual as when he joined Crystal Palace as a youngster.

"He remains in close touch with Alan Smith, his youth team coach who is now in his second stint as manager at Selhurst Park.

"I was delighted their results have picked up recently," says Southgate.

"I remember him telling me after a few months that I was a nice lad but had no chance as a professional footballer. He thought I'd make a good travel agent."

Whether Southgate gets his ticket out of Villa Park remains to be seen.



Gareth Southgate: Despite starting for Villa all season he is still determined to leave Villa.

WEST HAM AND RANGERS DISCUSS AMORUSO MOVE

Lorenzo Amoruso: Early discussions with English club West Ham for his services.

Rangers have had had 'initial discussions' with West Ham for their Italian central defender Lorenzo Amoruso.

Rangers chairman David Murray told the club's official website that the talks were at a very early stage only.

"Who can say whether they will come to anything or not."

West Ham manager Harry Redknapp said Amoruso was "a player I'd like to have at the club".

Murray emphasised that no deal would be agreed before the start of Scottish soccer's winter break next week.

Rangers will want at least five million pounds for Amoruso, even though he has not been a first team regular this season.

RIVALDO APPLIES FOR SPANISH STATUS

Brazilian forward Rivaldo is planning to take out dual-nationality next year, the player's representative Josep Maria Minguella confirmed.

The Barcelona star, who began his career in Spain with Deportivo La Coruna in 1996, would therefore gain European Union status and not have to take up a foreigner's berth at the Catalan club.

"There are a lot of benefits on a professional and personal level," Minguella told Spanish national radio.

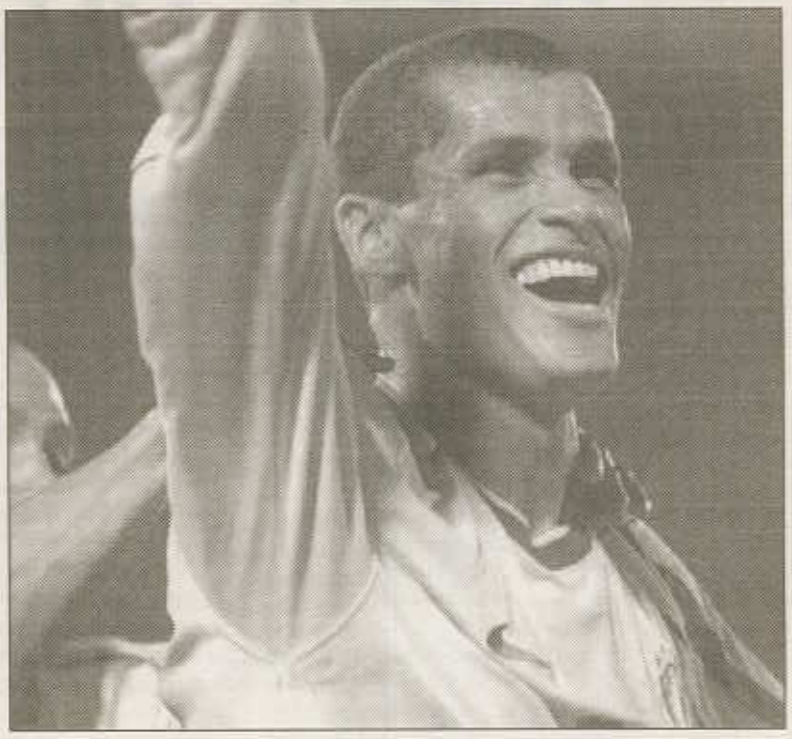
"For the club, he wouldn't have to take up a foreigner's place and that's important for him personally as well."

In Spanish newspapers, Rivaldo was quoted as saying: "I still haven't applied but I'm starting to prepare the documentation.

"It's good for the club as they'll be able to sign more foreigners. When I'm older it will be easier to transfer me.

"Personally, I'll be able to stay in Spain with my family for as long as I want and be treated as a European."

If Rivaldo goes ahead with the application, and is successful, dual-nationality will not affect his status as a Brazilian international.



Rivaldo: Planning to apply for a Spanish passport.

INTER TO ENTER TRANSFER MARKET

OWEN NOT IN PICTURE

Vampeta: Expected to leave the club.

Inter Milan intend to return to the transfer market in the New Year but said Liverpool forward Michael Owen was not on their shopping list.

Inter have sold Chilean striker Ivan Zamorano to America of Mexico and expect Brazilian midfielder Vampeta to leave once the market reopens on January 2, the club confirmed on its website.

"Other transfers might be possible once the market reopens," Inter said.

"However, those operations will not include any possible deal for Liverpool's England player Michael Owen, who does not enter into the club's plans."

Owen has been linked to Inter in the English press but Liverpool denied the Italian club had approached them.

Inter have Christian Vieri and highly-rated Uruguayan striker Alvaro Recoba in their forward line.

Ronaldo is due to return from an eight-month injury lay-off soon.

The Milan side are 11th in the 18-team Serie A with just four wins from 12.

Ivan Zamorano: Former Inter striker now playing in Mexico.

CHARLTON ENDORSES UNITED AS BEST EVER

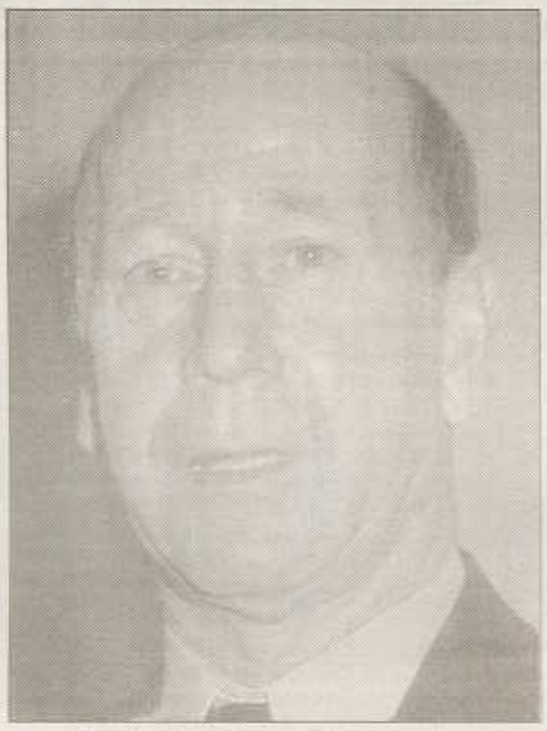
They won last season's championship by 18 points and are already eight points clear this season.

Yet Sir Alex Ferguson had to hear it from Manchester United legend Sir Bobby Charlton before he was satisfied he has indeed built the best side in Old Trafford history.

"I believe this is the best side this club has ever had. And I've spoken to Sir Bobby and he shares that opinion with me," said the delighted manager.

"The statistics point to that as well. They have surpassed the 1968 team of Best, Law and Charlton. The Busby Babes team of the 1950s? Nobody knows how good they could have become."

Ferguson's team are odds-on favourites to win their seventh Premiership title in nine seasons and they can also boast three FA Cups, the European Cup, European Cup-Winners Cup and League Cup.



Bobby Charlton: Agrees that Alex Ferguson's current United side is the best ever to have played at Old Trafford.

Ferguson used to say the 1994 Double side with Paul Ince and Roy Keane in midfield, and Eric Cantona and Mark Hughes was the toughest of them all.

But the current crop has more flair and goals in them.

Ferguson believes they can go on and possibly surpass what the Liverpool glory sides of the 1970s and 80s achieved.

"It isn't going to be me who will make decisions about their place in football history. They will do that themselves," he says.

"It is the nature of our players to win and win again. The vital ingredient is that hunger which is stronger than ever."

"At the moment there will still be some discerning, reluctant voice about how well they have done. But when you see how they have grown up together, it's terrific.

Undoubtedly Ferguson's view will trigger debate among the Old Trafford faithful as well as the prawn sandwich brigade.

Past efforts to suggest a better side than Best, Charlton and Law have been deemed blasphemous and

Manchester United celebrate winning the 1999 Champions league final against Bayern Munich.

been dismissed quickly.

Nonetheless as Ferguson rightly points out, statistics alone support his view. As aforementioned Ferguson has won countless titles during his stewardship, whereas Sir Matt Busby won just two league titles, the FA Cup and the European Cup in a total of six seasons.

However it is their sheer dominance that gives Ferguson the most pleasure:

"I use the analogy that people just want to go on a foreign holiday once in their life, they want to go to Spain and say they have been there and come back. That's it. My players want to win, they have great pride, they are hungry.

"The hunger has got nothing to do with putting bread on the table or getting £1m in the bank. It is about trying to achieve things, and then strive for other things. They have been great like that.

"You always hope there is a percentage, an inch of improvement still to come. That's the way life is. We have got to be like that, it's a moving bus, we can't wait for people. I think the maturity this team has shown is the main reason for that. The players have grown up together, it's a really good team now, a really good team.

ROMARIO READY TO GO BACK TO BARCA

Romario is ready to return to Barcelona if the club want him.

"I have incredible offers for transfers but I would only leave Brazil to play in Barcelona," he said in an interview with *Sport* newspaper.

Romario, who still holds hero status at the Nou Camp, left the club in 1995 after two highly successful seasons to move to Flamengo.

After a brief spell at Valencia back in Spain he returned to Brazil, once again playing for Flamengo before a move to his current club Vasco de Gama.

At the age of 34, he is back in the Brazilian national team and playing some of the best football of his career.

His hat-trick in last weeks 4-3 Copa Mercosour final win over Palmeiras took his goal tally this year to a scarcely credible 71 and Italian giants Inter Milan are rumoured to be one of the top European clubs bidding for his services.

"I'm older and better, like wine, no?" he said. "I don't smoke, I don't drink and I run as much as I have to on the field of play.

"That's why I've scored so many goals this season at the age of 34. I'm playing as well as I did in 1994, my best season, but scoring more goals.

Romario: Would only leave Brazil to play for former club Barcelona.

Age is not an excuse.

"I know this is the moment to return to Barcelona. If they want me, well now they know.

"Either I go to Barcelona, or I stay in Rio. There is no other option."

Barcelona could be tempted by the proposition after a disappointing start to the current season that saw them crash out of the Champions League at the first stage.

Club officials have said that signing a defender is the priority before the transfer window in Spain closes at the end of January but they could see Romario as a replacement for one of their two under-performing strikers, Alfonso and Dani.

PLATINI NAMED FRANCE'S BEST

Michel Platini has been named the greatest French player of the century in a poll published in the latest edition of *France Football magazine*.

A panel of experts assembled by the influential magazine chose former French captain Platini ahead of Zinedine Zidane and Raymond Kopa.

Midfielder Platini scored 41 goals in 72 internationals for France — more than any other player — was skipper on 50 occasions and led France to the 1984 European title.

Aime Jacquet, who guided France to their 1998 World Cup triumph, was named coach of the century by the magazine's panel, ahead of former Reims, St Etienne and national team coach Albert Batteux, who coached France between 1955 and 1962, and Michel Hidalgo, who coached the national team to the 1984 European title.

The French team of 1998-2000, which won the World Cup and the European Championship, was named as the French team of the last 100 years, ahead of the team of 1982-86, which made the semi-finals of the 1982 World Cup and won the 1984 European title.

Then came the St Etienne side of the 1974-77, which won three straight league titles and reached the European Cup final in 1976 only to lose to Bayern Munich.

Aime Jacquet: Named the best French coach after winning the 1998 World Cup.

Michel Platini: Voted the best ever French footballer.

WHY DOES ANFIELD HATE HOULLIER

Under the guidance of French born manager Gerard Houllier, Liverpool have regained some of its intimidation and fear of a team that is not only entertaining but able to grab all three points both at Anfield and away from home, as we have seen with wins over Arsenal and Man United over recent weeks.

But why do Liverpool's fans still find it hard to embrace their new leader?

Liverpool supporters' fears about the future of Michael Owen and Robbie Fowler are nothing compared to the concern at the club that Gerard Houllier may quit over the lack of faith shown in him by sections of The Kop.

When it comes to Houllier, the old Anfield anthem that you never walk alone is not quite true.

The former teacher has added intelligence, forward planning and several gifted players to a team that was adrift in the doldrums before his arrival.

Indeed, the Liverpool hierarchy see him as not only the best but their most ruthless manager since Bill Shankly.

However, there is anything but universal support for him on the Merseyside streets. Even in the aftermath of Liverpool's wins over Manchester United and Arsenal, his methods are still demeaned, his credibility still doubted by many.

Now chairman David Moores is worried that Houllier will not put up with the treatment he receives via radio chat shows and through the post for much longer.

The very self-belief and decisiveness which could lead Houllier to sell Fowler or Owen — or both — could also, Liverpool fear, be the factor that leads him to move to a club where he feels more appreciated, and for a lot more money than his current £20,000 a week.

Moores and chief executive Rick Parry are convinced that there are few men better suited to the job of revitalising Liverpool than Houllier, the man brought in as Roy Evans' partner in 1998 and then given free rein.

Gerard Houllier: Despite Liverpool's improvement over the last two seasons, fans at Anfield are still unwilling to except the Frenchman.

Yet, even in the hours after Liverpool's victory at Old Trafford, their first at the ground for 10 years — one supporter demanded that Houllier should go. In a recent poll, Houllier received only 64 per cent support.

Many still cannot accept that the good old days are long gone. Having enjoyed unprecedented European and domestic success for 20 years, the fans demand an instant return to such dominance.

The fact that Houllier first had to dismantle the team he took over, then bring in new players before conducting the current finishing process seems of no consequence to his critics, especially as he continues to insist that his new side is still some way off the benchmark set by Manchester United.

Houllier is too worldly-wise not to realise that no football manager will ever engender total support from the supporters.

But as one of the men who laid the foundations for France's World Cup and European Championship success, as a coach and manager who would be in demand virtually anywhere in the football world, he will not continue to tolerate the lack of realism or respect shown to him.

His man-management skills are well-honed. Indeed, Danny Murphy, the hero in Liverpool's win at Old Trafford, was anxious to express his gratitude to Houllier for resurrecting his career.

After joining Liverpool from Crewe for £1.5million in 1997, Murphy struggled to break into the first team. But when he asked for a transfer last season, Houllier turned down his request.

Murphy said: "I can't praise him enough, firstly for his honesty and then for sticking by what he said. He told me if I worked hard, progressed and did well he would pick me. I did what he asked and that's exactly what's happened — he has picked me.

"Now I'm keen to be part of what promises to be a magnificent few years for Liverpool. I couldn't ask for any more."

If only the outlook was so sweet for Houllier, however. Crisis point will come when he makes his decision on Fowler and Owen, with the former the favourite to be offloaded.

Ferguson, it is suggested, is one who would pay good money for Anfield's Artful Dodger, even though traditionally Liverpool and United never buy each other's players for reasons of local football politics, never mind the fear that such moves would backfire on the sellers.

Yet, such is Houllier's focused approach to his job that he would have no problem in selling Fowler to Old Trafford because he would have no fears about the potential consequences. He respects the Liverpool tradition but is working towards long-term gain rather than short-term pettiness.

Should Houllier's vision be that Fowler goes it would not matter to him where he went or how well he might fare.

Although in ruthless attitude he is considered a throwback to Shankly, he is in the business of breaking the Merseyside mould. He is not interested in one-upmanship but in making Liverpool successful.

WORLD

PREMIER LEAGUE

(Left Picture): David Beckahm (left) and Roy Keane (right) celebrate Beckham's penalty (right picture) converted during the first half of Manchester United's 1-1 draw with Newcastle United at St James Park.

IPSWICH TOWN 3 TOTTENHAM 0

Tottenham were left with the worst away record in the Premier League, nine defeats in 11 matches, while Ipswich went third.

Marcus Stewart gave the home side the lead in the eighth minute with a close-range tap-in. Alan Armstrong scored the second in the 62nd minute from Stewart's cross and Jamie Clapham added the third two minutes from time.

ARSENAL 2 SUNDERLAND 2

Arsenal gave away a 2-0 lead and the chance to rein in leaders Manchester United. Patrick Vieira scored his third goal in four games in the fifth minute and Lee Dixon made it 2-0 before halftime, connecting with a cross from Thierry Henry.

Kevin Phillips hauled Sunderland back into the game with a 53rd minute penalty after Vieira had handled in the area and Gavin McCann equalised seven minutes from time.

MAN. CITY 1 CHARLTON 4

Manchester City dropped into the relegation zone after a woeful performance, looking out of their depth as Jonatan Johansson scored twice before halftime.

Graham Stuart made it 3-0 from the spot in the 79th and Claus Jensen scored a deflected fourth for the visitors before City's consolation, a last minute penalty converted by Darren Huckerby on his debut.

Patrick Vieira (left) and Tony Adams: Vieira celebrates scoring during the 2-2 draw against Sunderland.

M'BROUGH 1 COVENTRY 1

Former Coventry striker Noel Whelan had a nightmare on his birthday, scoring an own goal in the 41st minute before being taken off in the second half.

Alen Boksic, a second half substitute for Christian Karembeu, saved the day four minutes from time. Head coach Terry Venables could boast afterwards that no player from an opposing team has scored against Middlesbrough in his four games in charge.

NEWCASTLE 1 MAN. UNITED 1

A 25th minute penalty by David Beckham, after Ryan Giggs was fouled, put Manchester United ahead.

But Newcastle never gave up and, after Christian Bassedas shot over the bar, equalised nine minutes from time through substitute Stephen Glass.

S'HAMPTON 1 DERBY 0

James Beattie headed in Marian Pahars' cross for his 10th goal in 10 matches to lift Southampton to 12th place.

Derby stayed 16th, a point off the relegation zone.

★★★★

Matches postponed because of the weather:

ASTON VILLA V LEICESTER CITY

BRADFORD CITY V LIVERPOOL

EVERTON V LEEDS UNITED

WEST HAM UNITED V CHELSEA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1. Man. United	**21**	**14**	**5**	**2**	**48**	**15**	**47**
2. Arsenal	21	11	6	4	38	21	39
3. Ipswich Town	21	11	4	6	32	22	37
4. Sunderland	21	10	6	5	25	21	36
5. Leicester	20	10	5	5	23	21	35
6. Liverpool	20	10	3	7	37	25	33
7. Newcastle United	21	9	4	8	23	26	31
8. West Ham United	20	7	8	5	30	21	29
9. Aston Villa	19	7	8	4	23	18	29
10. Charlton Athletic	21	8	4	9	30	36	28
11. Chelsea	20	7	6	7	37	27	27
12. Southampton	21	7	6	8	27	32	27
13. Tottenham Hotspur	21	7	5	9	26	32	26
14. Leeds United	19	7	4	8	26	27	25
15. Everton	20	6	4	10	21	32	22
16. Derby County	21	4	8	9	23	36	20
17. Coventry City	21	5	5	11	20	36	20
18. Middlesbrough	21	4	7	10	22	29	19
19. Manchester City	21	5	4	12	26	37	19
20. Bradford City	20	2	6	12	14	37	12

Sunderland players jump on top of each other as they celebrate snatching a 2-2 draw away to Arsenal.

RUSSO WRITES

By Joe Russo

As the Serie A takes a two-week break for the Festive Season, it is time to reflect on some teams, namely Roma, Juventus, Lazio and AC Milan, after 12 rounds and see where they might be heading during the rest of the season.

Roma are at the top of the table on 29 points, 6 points clear of their nearest rivals Juventus on 23.They are hot favourites to take the title this year — a title they haven't achieved since 1983.

There are three key factors in their success: Fabio Capello, Gabriel Batistuta and Francesco Totti.

Capello is the most successful Serie A coach (Four Italian tiles and one Spanish title) of the current lot. He is no media darling, but he gets the results that matter and it is his experience and guidance that will see Roma do very well.

Batistuta is the best striker in the world - Rivaldo, Andryi Shevchenko, Figo, Christian Vieri and Thierry Henry are very good as well, but for my money Batistuta is ahead of them all. He is into his tenth year in Italian football (nine years at Fiorentina previously) and he is scoring goals very regularly — 10 so far this season. He has proved himself in the Serie A, the world's best league while the others mentioned are yet to do so, and like a good wine, he just gets better with age!

Totti is the best Italian player around and, as a playmaker, he rivals French maestro Zinedine Zidane. Totti is adored in Rome and who could blame them.

Juventus will challenge Roma all the way but then again this is Juventus, the greatest club side in the history of football, and they never have a bad season.

This season has been a 'bad' one so far with their dismal exit from the Champions League, so all focus now will be on the Serie A title.

A team that can regularly leave Filippo Inzaghi on the bench (Darko Kovacevic seems to be preferred) must have some depth. Their lineup still boasts Alex Del Piero, Zidane, Ciro Ferrara, David Trezeguet and Edwin Van Der Sar just to name a few.

The only weak link in Juve's armoury is their coach Carlo Ancelotti. He is not known for his success because he was an ordinary player who somehow played for Italy and then, incredibly, was appointed to take over at Juve two years ago when Marcello Lippi quit.

It may have been understandable if he was a former Juve player who was much loved by fans, but he isn't. He is a former AC Milan and Roma stalwart. Little wonder fans protested strongly at his first training sessions two years ago urging him to go! I can't see him lasting beyond the season unless miraculously Juve win the Scudetto.

Current champions Lazio are in fourth place but that looks like their best this year. With coach, Sven Goran Eriksson, on his way to England in June, it is hard to see how he can stay focused on the job at hand.

Despite him telling all and sundry how much he wants to remain in Rome until the end of season, it will actually be a miracle if he does!

They are truly an excellent team with some fantastic players, including one of the very best defenders in the world — their captain Alessandro Nesta — but despite their talent 'on the park', it is off it where they will run into strife.

AC Milan will hover around the top 5 teams or so, but they are too far off the pace to make a real impression. On their day they are capable of beating any team, but their consistency is the problem. The recent loss at home to Perugia is testimony to that.

Their striker Shevchenko is currently the leading goalscorer in the Serie A and is arguably as good as any going around. However, in my humble opinion, he is the second best striker in the Serie A to Batistuta.

AC Milan are still captained by the brilliant Paolo Maldini, who never seems to put a foot wrong. He would still be one of the first players selected in any World XI.

A forgotten man at Milan is the veteran German striker Oliver Bierhoff. He very much lives in the shadow of Shevchenko these days, but he is still capable of scoring and will prove to be very handy as the season progresses. Furthermore, he is well liked by coach, Alberto Zaccheroni, who brought him across with him from Udinese at the beginning of his current stint at Milan three seasons ago.

WORLD

SPAIN TO LOOK AT HOME

Spanish Football Federation chief Angel Maria Villar says Spain should not follow the example of England and appoint a foreign coach to run the national team.

Villar will do everything possible to try to persuade current coach Jose Antonio Camacho to stay on after the next World Cup in 2002 when his contract is up.

But if Camacho decides to try his luck elsewhere there is little chance of the RFEF copying their English counterparts who have recruited Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson to take over when he leaves Lazio in July.

"It's not something I'm in favour of," said Villar in an interview with *Marca*.

"While I'm in charge I will always want the coach to be from here, along with all the assistant coaches he has around him. The national team must represent our country."

"We're very satisfied with the work of Camacho. He has all our confidence.

"We'll do all we can to try to make sure he doesn't go (after the World Cup)."

Jose Antonio Camacho: Persuaded to stay on as National coach after the 2002 World Cup.

FRANCESCOLI ADDED TO RIVER'S SHORT LIST

River Plate, who are still debating who should coach the team next year, have added former Uruguayan international Enzo Francescoli to their list of candidates.

Vice-president Alfredo Davicce said last week that Francescoli had joined current coach Americo Gallego, fellow Uruguayan Hugo de Leon and former River coach Ramon Diaz on the shortlist.

"The first candidate is Gallego, the second is Ramon (Diaz) and their third is Francescoli," Davicce said.

Francescoli, who retired from playing in 1998, ended his career at the club where he was immensely popular with the supporters. He has not coached a professional team before.

Gallego led River Plate to the Argentine Clausura championship title in the first half of the year but could be a victim of the success of arch-rivals Boca Juniors.

Boca completed a unique treble this year, winning the Apertura championship, the South American Libertadores Cup and the Intercontinental Cup, increasing the pressure on their bitter rivals.

Enzo Francescoli: Added to a short list of possible coaches at River Plate.

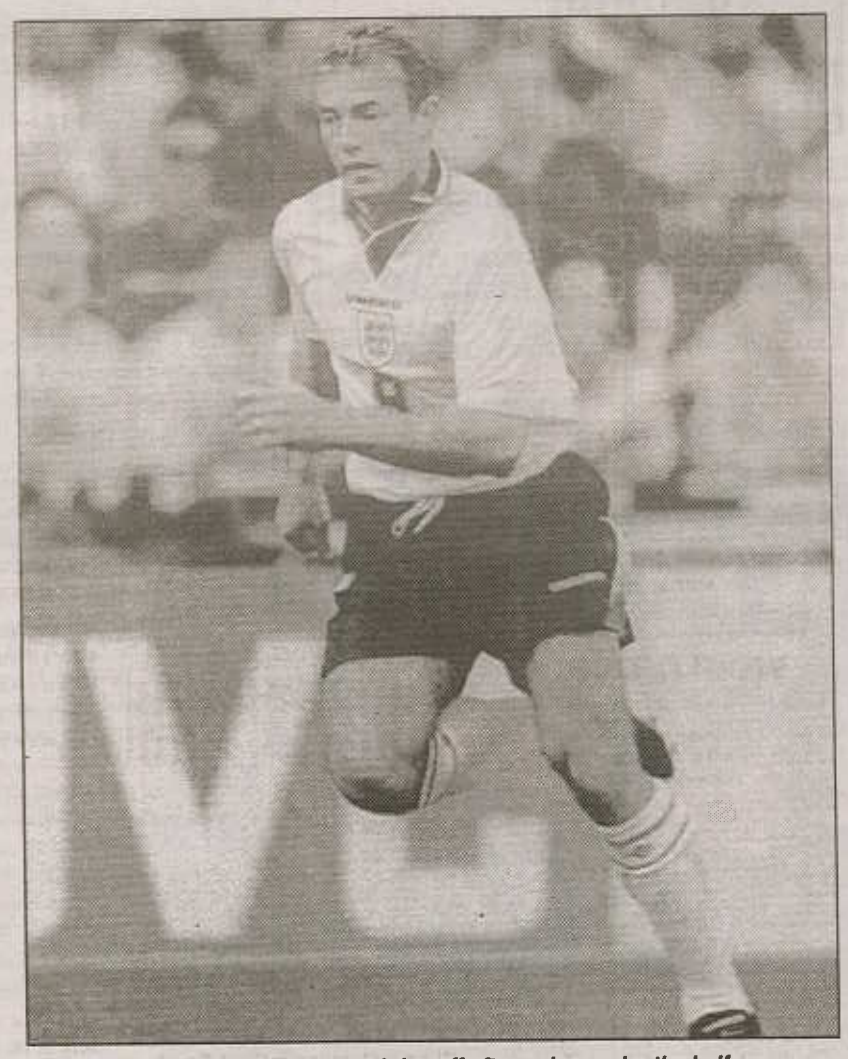
SURGERY FOR SHEARER

Newcastle United striker Alan Shearer is recovering from knee surgery last Wednesday however the former England captain is expected to be sidelined for three months, the English Premier League club said.

Shearer missed United's 2-1 home victory over Leeds United on Boxing Day and manager Bobby Robson confirmed that the former England captain would be having surgery.

Robson, who earlier this month described his captain as a "flogged horse in many respects", said it would take Shearer three months in total to get match fit again.

Shearer, 30, has been suffering from tendinitis and steroid injections have failed to resolve the problem.



Alan Shearer: Three month lay off after going under the knife.

DANI DROPS DOWN TO DIVISION TWO

Second division club Atletico Madrid completed the signing of Portuguese international midfielder Dani Carvalho.

Dani, formerly with Ajax Amsterdam, joins Atletico after a controversial exit from Benfica.

He joined the Portuguese club on a four-year deal in September but unilaterally decided to rescind his contract after less than three months.

"Atletico Madrid have been, still are and always will be a great club," the player said on his presentation last week.

"They have a great tradition and real quality."

Atletico have still to receive clearance from FIFA for Dani to play for them following his messy departure from Benfica.

"I expect the clearance to come through in the next few days," said club official Vicente Montes.

Dani: Moving back to Spain, this time with Atletico Madrid.

WORLD

FIFA World Rankings

(Valid until January 17)

1	Brazil	69	Burkina Faso	137	Swaziland
2	France	69	Congo DR	138	Bahrain
3	Argentina	71	Uzbekistan	138	Luxemburg
4=	Italy	72=	Albania	140	Tanzania
4=	Czech Republic	72=	AUSTRALIA	141	Fiji
6	Portugal	74=	Kuwait	142	Korea DPR
7	Spain	74=	China PR	143=	Grenada
8	Netherlands	76	FYR Macedonia	143=	Antigua and Barbuda
9=	Yugoslavia	77	Cuba	145=	Andorra
9=	Paraguay	78	Bosnia-Herz	145=	St Kitts & Nevis
11	Germany	79=	Iraq	147	Liechtenstein
12	Mexico	79=	Guinea	148	Benin
13	Romania	81	Togo	149	Sri Lanka
14	Norway	82	Algeria	150	Botswana
15	Colombia	83=	El Salvador	151	Bangladesh
16	United States	83=	Haiti	152	Dominica
17	England	85	Lithuania	153	Bermuda
18	Croatia	86	Congo	154	Maldives
19	Chile	87	Namibia	154	Gambia
20	South Africa	88	Senegal	156	Cape Verde Is
21	Russia	89	Gabon	157	Dominican Rep
22	Denmark	90=	Armenia	158	Eritrea
22	Sweden	90=	New Zealand	159	Cayman Islands
24	Slovakia	92	Latvia	160	Yemen
25	Scotland	93	Northern Ireland	161	Mauritania
26	Tunisia	94	Moldova	162	Chinese Taipei
27	Belgium	95=	Liberia	163	Chad
28	Morocco	95=	Belarus	164	Surinam
29	Trinidad & Tobago	97	Indonesia	165	Laos
30	Turkey	98	Mali	166	Nepal
31	Ireland Rep	99	Vietnam SR	167	Vanuatu
32	Uruguay	100	Syria	168	San Marino
33	Egypt	101	Singapore	169	Cambodia
34	Ukraine	102=	Qatar	170	Cook Islands
35	Slovenia	102=	Uganda	171	Palestine
36	Saudi Arabia	104	Barbados	172	British Virgin Is.
36	Iran	105	Jordan	173	Samoa
38	Japan	106	Oman	174	Kyrgyzstan
39	Cameroon	107=	Malaysia	175	Netherlands Ant
40	Korea Republic	107=	Kenya	176	Central African R.
41	Israel	109	Wales	177	Guinea-Bissau
42	Greece	110	Lebanon	178	Bahamas
43	Poland	111	Venezuela	179	Philippines
44	Austria	112	Mozambique	179	Macao
45	Peru	113	Malawi	181	Sao Tome e Principe
46	Honduras	114	Madagascar	182	Niger
47	Hungary	115	Azerbaijan	183	Guyana
48=	Jamaica	116	Libya	184	Aruba
48=	Zambia	117	Faroe Islands	185	Tonga
50	Iceland	118	Mauritius	186	Belize
51	Cote d' Ivoire	119	Malta	187	Equatorial Guinea
52	Nigeria	120	Kazakhstan	188	Seychelles
53=	Bulgaria	121	Panama	189	Djibouti
53=	Ecuador	122	India	190	Pakistan
55	Angola	123	Hong Kong	191	Nicaragua
56	Guatemala	124	Myanmar	192	Papua New Guinea
57=	Ghana	125	Turkmenistan	193	Brunei Dar
57=	Switzerland	126	Burundi	194	Somalia
59	Finland	127	St Vincent/Gr	195	Puerto Rico
60	Costa Rica	128	Rwanda	196=	Mongolia
61	Thailand	129	Sierra Leone	196=	Anguilla
62	Cyprus	130	Solomon Islands	198	US Virgin Islands
63	Canada	131	Tahiti	199	Guam
64	UAE	132	Sudan	200	Turks & Caicos Isl
65	Bolivia	133	Ethiopia	201	Bhutan
66	Georgia	134	Tajikistan	202	Montserrat
67	Estonia	135	St Lucia		
68	Zimbabwe	136	Lesotho		

***Note:** Teams inactive since 1991 and teams which have not played yet to do not appear in the table.*

2000: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Highs, the lows and a season of winners

A dramatic golden goal ensured the new century in soccer began with France again in the ascendant.

France, world champions in 1998, were crowned European champions for the first time in 2000, winning an outstanding competition with a 2-1 win over Italy in Rotterdam.

Real Madrid became the first European club champions of the new century with a 3-0 victory over Valencia in Paris in the first European Cup final to be contested by two teams from the same country.

Their record eighth success in the tournament earned them FIFA's "Team of the Century" award.

Cameroon underlined their dominant position in Africa, albeit with a controversial penalty shootout victory over Nigeria in the African Nations

Cup in March, and followed that up with another penalty shootout victory over Spain to win the gold medal in the Olympics in Sydney in September.

Zinedine Zidane, who inspired France to victory in Euro 2000 in similar fashion to his heroics in the World Cup, was named World Footballer of the Year by FIFA for the second time.

Manchester United, who lost their European crown to Real but won the English Premier League for the sixth time in eight seasons, were judged to be the richest club in the world for the third straight year with an annual turnover of 110.9 million pounds ($163.6 million) — up from 87.9 million pounds ($129.7 million) in 1999.

Zinedine Zidane: World Player of the year in 2000.

GERMANY GET WORLD CUP

Germany, whose national team failed abysmally with a first round exit at Euro 2000 after winning the competition four years earlier, emerged as perhaps the biggest winners of all.

In Zurich in July, FIFA awarded them the right to stage the 2006 World Cup finals when its Executive Committee voted 12-11 in their favour over South Africa.

The result of that particular battle caused more fall-out than anything on the field of play in 2000.

Charlie Dempsey of New Zealand abstained rather than voted for the South Africans as he had been mandated to do by his Oceania confederation because of what he called "intolerable pressure" brought to bear on him before the vote.

If he had voted for South Africa, FIFA president Sepp Blatter's casting vote would have taken the World Cup to Africa for the first time. It will now be at least another 10 years before that can happen.

France celebrate winning the European Championship held in Holland and Belgium.

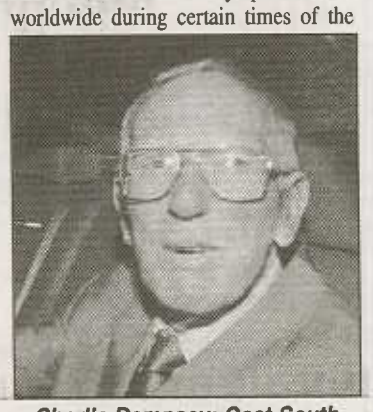
PLAYER POWER

And as the major clubs get richer so do the players, whose power is likely to be even further enhanced by proposals from the European Commission on a player's right to end his contract.

The impact that the new regulations would have on the global game can not be stressed too highly with FIFA itself admitting if it does not reach agreement with Brussels the sport will be thrown into chaos.

Transfers will still take place and domestic transfers between clubs in the same country are unlikely to be affected.

But the international scene will be radically different with arbitrary transfer fees replaced by compensation fees, shorter contracts, a new arbitration system and transfers only permissible worldwide during certain times of the season.



Charlie Dempsey: Cost South Africa the 2006 World Cup.

Rules concerning the movement of players into Europe from South America, Africa, Asia or Australasia may also be tightened, especially with regard to teenagers.

UEFA's Chief Executive Gerhard Aigner, one of the most powerful and influential men in the sport, sounded a warning last week that UEFA must consider reforming the Champions League because with 32 teams it is too big and is saturating the fixture list.

Cameroon tasted Golden Olympic glory in Sydney.

However no change can take place for two years because of current TV contract commitments.

But some big clubs like Lazio, Bayern Munich and Juventus have played matches this season in half-empty stadiums and TV audiences are falling.

The warning signs have been there for some time and although soccer will remain the world's most popular sport, there is no doubt it finds itself on the threshold of major change.

QANTAS
THE SPIRIT OF AUSTRALIA

National Soccer League	TOTAL							HOME						AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A
SOUTH MELBOURNE	12	8	3	1	26	8	27	6	5	1	0	16	4	6	3	2	1	10	4
WOLLONGONG WOLVES	12	8	2	2	26	15	26	6	4	1	1	12	7	6	4	1	1	14	8
PARRAMATTA POWER	12	7	1	4	20	13	22	7	4	0	3	13	10	5	3	1	1	7	3
PERTH GLORY	12	6	3	3	22	11	21	6	4	1	1	13	3	6	2	2	2	9	8
SYDNEY OLYMPIC	12	6	3	3	19	12	21	6	4	1	1	11	4	6	2	2	2	8	8
NORTHERN SPIRIT	12	5	4	3	16	11	19	6	3	3	0	7	2	6	2	1	3	9	9
MARCONI STALLIONS	12	5	4	3	15	10	19	6	3	1	2	10	7	6	2	3	1	5	3
ADELAIDE CITY FORCE	12	6	1	5	20	24	19	7	4	1	2	15	13	5	2	0	3	5	11
SYDNEY UNITED	12	4	4	4	17	20	16	6	2	3	1	9	10	6	2	1	3	8	10
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS	12	4	3	5	18	20	15	6	3	2	1	11	6	6	1	1	4	7	14
CANBERRA COSMOS	12	4	2	6	21	22	14	5	2	0	3	9	8	7	2	2	3	12	14
FOOTBALL KINGZ	12	4	2	6	19	21	14	6	3	1	2	12	6	6	1	1	4	7	15
BRISBANE STRIKERS	12	3	4	5	19	20	13	5	2	2	1	12	8	7	1	2	4	7	12
NEWCASTLE UNITED	12	2	5	5	10	20	11	7	2	2	3	7	9	5	0	3	2	3	11
EASTERN PRIDE	12	2	3	7	18	23	9	6	1	3	2	8	9	6	1	0	5	10	14

Matches played against Carlton will result in all teams being awarded a 3-0 win and 3 competition points

PARRAMATTA POWER 3
(Brown 63, Lee 69, Miller 74)
NORTHERN SPIRIT 0

Venue: Parramatta Stadium. **Crowd:** 8,176. **Referee:** C Dionis.
Cautions: Bennett (PP) 42, J Griffiths (PP) 52, Enes (NS) 57, Cunico (NS) 68, Thomas (NS) 72.
Teams: PARRAMATTA POWER: Crews: Vrkic, Orlic, Tobin, Lee: Elrich, Bennett (Ardone 86), Blagojevic, Brown: J.Griffiths, Miller.
NORTHERN SPIRIT: Henderson: Bingley, Arnold (Enes 38), Bilokapic (Moreira 70),: Foster, Spencer, Cunico, Thomas, Langdon: Burgess, R. Griffiths.

NEWCASTLE UNITED 1
(Buonavoglia 52pen)
SYDNEY UNITED 1
(Sprod 89og)

Venue: Marathon Stadium. **Crowd:** 8,305. **Referee:** M Breeze.
Cautions: McBreen (NU) 21, Younis (SU) 40, Deur (SU) 42, Masi (NU) 59, A Genc (SU) 65.
Teams: NEWCASTLE UNITED: Catlin, Roberts, Zoricich, McManus, Sprod, Dodd, Wilson, Buonavoglia, Tsekenis (Surjan 87), Wieczorek (Magnacca 79), McBreen (Masi 58).
SYDNEY UNITED: Tolios, Burt, Plesa, Younis, Arambasic, Pondeljak, Deur, Rastall, Genc, Menapi (Awaritefe 73), Webb.

LEADING GOALSCORERS
After Round Eleven

BURGESS B	(Northern Spirit)	7
CHIPPERFIELD S	(Wollongong)	7
MILLER J	(Parramatta)	7
VLAHOS A.	(Sth Melb)	7

WOLLONGONG WOLVES 4
(Reid 18, Chipperfield 5, 63 & 73)
EASTERN PRIDE 2
(Roach 37, Watkins 87)

Venue: WIN Stadium. **Crowd:** 4,107. **Referee:** B Hugo.
Cautions: Wearne (EP) 68, Gotis (EP) 80.
Teams: WOLVES: Barlow, Ceccoli, Cervinski, Horsley, Reid, Young (Petrovski 53), Chipperfield, Huxley, Blake, Mennillo (O'Grady 86), Middleby (Nicholson 79).
PRIDE: Jevdjevic, Fak, Gotis, Ki Kim (MacNical 86), Katz (Sekulovski 73), Bell, Roach, Hutchinson, Wearne, Watkins, Stergiopoulos.

BRISBANE STRIKERS 6
(Rech 49, 50 & 76, Harris 64 & 78, Foster 22pen)
ADELAIDE CITY FORCE 2
(Hassell 54, Tunbridge 75)

Venue: Suncorp Stadium. **Crowd:** 2,180. **Referee:** J Peacock.
Cautions: Tunbridge (AC) 45, Davidson (BS) 52, Kovacevic (AC) 80, Pelosi (AC) 89.
Red Cards: North (BS) 83, Day (AC) 83
Teams: BRISBANE: Duke, Stefanutto, Foster, Srhoj (Smeltz 67), McLaren, North, Davidson, Harris (Dwyer 87), Meredith (Webber 61), Fernando, Hews.
ADELAIDE: Cagalj, Kovacevic, Bucciarelli, Veart, Vidmar, Hassell, Tunbridge, Pantelis, Terminello (Budin 67m), Karlovic (Day 74), Pelosi.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Wollongong Wolves' SCOTT CHIPPERFIELD: After last week becoming the clubs all time leading scorer, Chipperfield celebrated with a hat-trick against Eastern Pride.

CANBERRA COSMOS 0
FOOTBALL KINGZ 2
(Ibrahim 33, Vicelich 73)

Venue: Bruce Stadium. **Crowd:** 1,534. **Referee:** C Zetter.
Cautions: Rakic (CC) 28, Angelucci (CC) 35, Phillips (CC) 61, Ibrahim (FK) 72, Cartwright (FK) 87.
Teams: CANBERRA: Koristantinou, Popovich, Ravanello, Purdue, Castro, Angelucci, Arranz (Imaya 46), Rakic (Lyons 46), Phillips, Scott (Hagger 72), Miyazawa.
KINGZ: Eaddy, Osman, Perry, Rufer (Ngata 70), Bluhm, Ibrahim, Campbell (Lines 68), Vicelich, Cartwright, Douglas (Davis 77), Burton.

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS 1
(Da Costa 17)
PERTH GLORY 1
(Milicevic 13)

Venue: Knights Stadium. **Crowd:** 4,871. **Referee:** P. Mur.
Cautions: Miller (PG) 32, Milicevic (PG) 87.
Teams: MELBOURNE KNIGHTS: Teams not available at time of publication.
PERTH GLORY: Teams not available at time of publication.

SOUTH MELBOURNE 1
(Coveny 13)
SYDNEY OLYMPIC 0

Venue: Bob Jane Stadium **Crowd:** 14,215 **Referee:** J. Blaney
Cautions: Durakovic (SM) 60, Goutzoulis (SO) 61, Lozanovski (SM) 96, Owens (SO) 96.
Teams: SOUTH MELB: Petkovic, Clarkson, Durakovic (Iosifidis 72), Kismorbo, De Amicis, Coveny (Anastasiadis 85), Panopoulos, Boutsianis, Vlahos, Katogeracos (Lozanovski 68), Trimboli.
OLYMPIC: Bolton, Wilson, Juric, Baillie, Kohler, Sinozic, Goutzioulis (Parisi 76), Zorbas (Augerinos 64), Owens, Cardozo (Moore 83), Carle.

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS
BYE

ROUND 13

FRIDAY JANUARY 5
Northern Spirit vs Canberra Cosmos
Football Kingz vs Wollongong Wolves
Adelaide City Force vs Parramatta Power

SATURDAY JANUARY 6
Perth Glory vs Brisbane Strikers
Eastern Pride vs South Melbourne
Marconi Stallions vs Newcastle Breakers

SUNDAY JANUARY 7
Sydney Olympic vs Sydney United

Melbourne Knights bye